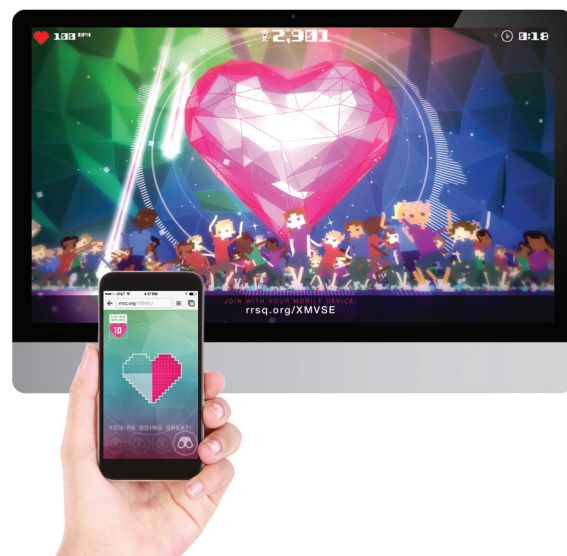


100
AGENCIES

CDM NEW YORK

Change for the better



“OUR FASTEST-GROWING DEPARTMENT, BY FAR, IS ANALYTICS.”
—KYLE BARICH

At the start of “You Are What’s Next,” a video self-portrait designed to shine a light on CDM New York’s professional chops and personality, the narrator solemnly intones that he’s about to share “a few words about you.” Over the next minute or so, the clip introduces viewers to the various mind-sets that fuel the agency’s creativity: those of the skeptic, the guru, the go-getter, the cheerleader and the “slightly dark and weird.” To emphasize the diversity, the video cuts briskly between in-office video, posed photos and client work. There is juggling and there are funny faces. All in all, “You Are What’s Next” paints a warm, lively picture of the company—while at the same time underlining the amount of effort firms the size of CDM NY must exert on a day-to-day basis to maintain their personnel preeminence.

Was that second part intentional? Absolutely, says agency president Kyle Barich. In 2013 CDM NY shook things up by rearranging the company into a series of 40-person groups, each with its own

creative director and client service director. With that new structure taking hold—and, to hear Barich tell it, contributing mightily to a new-business winning percentage of around .700—the agency focused a great deal of its attention in 2014 on training, challenging and, at least in theory, delighting its 355 or so people.

“We believe that if we put our energy and our effort into the development of the people who are here, and if we put everyone a little on edge, it’s going to show up in everything we do,” Barich explains. “There’s going to be change for the better. There’s going to be more energy.”

CDM NY, of course, is far from the only agency that places a premium on hunting for and retaining the industry’s most esteemed talent. Indeed, a perusal of this issue’s profiles suggests that roughly 100 out of the top 100 agencies are either prioritizing people-pleasing or planning to do so. What distinguishes CDM NY’s approach is that it doesn’t feel bolted on, as if it were something too low on the priority list to merit real attention but high enough that it couldn’t be entirely ignored.

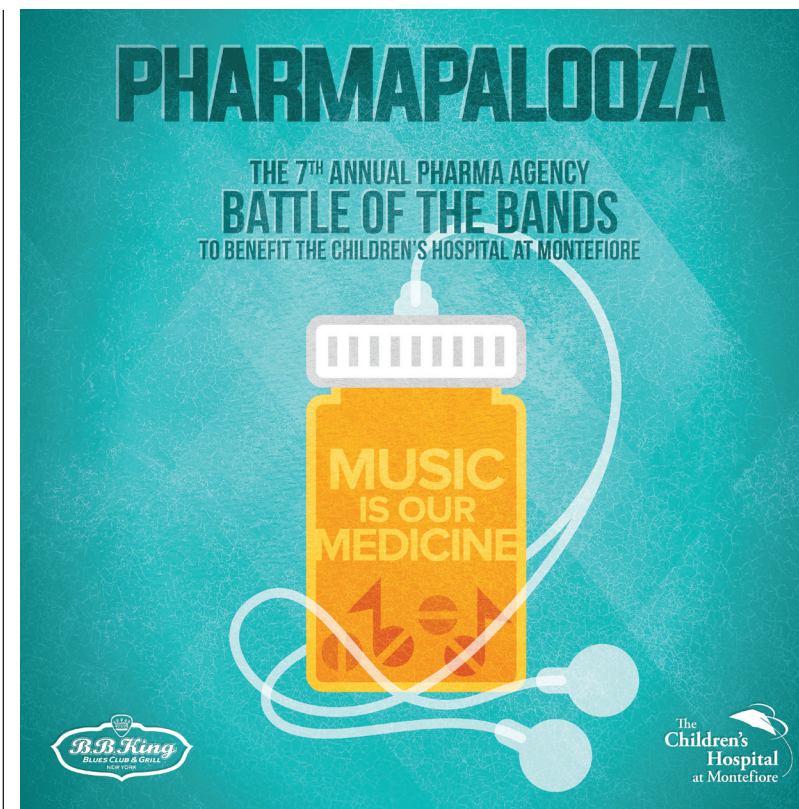
Each of the agency’s partners was asked to participate in a comprehensive leadership program during which they were trained in six core management competencies. Business dignitaries, like Harvard Business School professor/former Morgan Stanley organizational guru Tom DeLong, were brought in to address the company’s senior leaders. For new hires, CDM NY instituted a 90-day onboarding process.

The end result, according to managing partner, director of client services Lori Klein, is a happy staff that pitches in on the recruiting front without being asked. The agency has also created an ad hoc alumni network: a “boomerang population,” as Klein calls it, that returns to the CDM NY fold months or years or decades after having left it. “You need to be active in staying in touch,” she says, reporting that around 25% of people who leave the agency ultimately return.

CDM NY execs don’t explicitly say that other companies are doing it wrong, so to speak, but they believe that personnel has become the key area of differentiation among agencies. “In the current environment, which is rife with confusion and different channels and different ways of segmenting, [clients] look for great people to be their partners. The secret ingredient is putting the right people in the room,” Klein says.

In 2014 the company put many more people, presumably the right ones, in the rooms of its Los Angeles office. Technically still a satellite of the New York outpost, the LA office grew to 40 people as the company added a host of Left Coast clients, among them Gilead Sciences, ACADIA Pharmaceuticals and Quest Pharmaceuticals. As a result, what was previously little more than a local base for CDM NY’s Amgen business has blossomed into a bona fide weapon.

“A lot of agencies have gone into and left the



CDM New York’s work in motion: The Rhythm Rescue Game for the American Heart Assn., a multiscreen gaming app for hands-only CPR (opposite page); Pharmapalooza for Children’s Hospital at Montefiore (above); advocacy group for young adults with cancer (below)



West Coast, but I think people see us as a legitimate player,” says managing partner, executive creative director Chris Palmer.

General manager Wallye Holloway and SVP, creative director Shannon Hollman, both of whom helped kick-start the process of “taking our good DNA and establishing a distinct culture and mission and identity from it,” Palmer explains, now helm the LA office. While Barich adds that the office is “almost already there” in terms of independence from the NYC mother ship, he says that “the trigger will get pulled on conflict opportunities.” Read: Once CDM LA seizes a client or brand that

bumps up competitively against an existing CDM NY one, it’ll go solo. “They have the ability, resources, talent, structure and backing to be fully independent,” Barich says.

As witnessed by this cross-country cross-pollination, CDM NY earns high marks for its collaborative bent. Palmer identifies a collaboration with BBDO New York as “the biggest creative highlight” of the past year or two. The joint venture, Health-Work, was created to mesh CDM’s scientific insights with BBDO’s consumer ones. “This is two agencies with one mind,” Palmer promises. Clients who have taken advantage of the cross-functional expertise include Abbott Diagnostics, Takeda and Pfizer.

Pfizer, in fact, doubled down on CDM NY during the last year or so, charging the agency with additional oncology work and some assignments for its consumer health business. Other additions include Shire (in the rare-disease space) and Alexion. While Barich won’t go into details, he acknowledges that CDM NY lost a West Coast client during 2014: “They put their business into play every couple of years, which is always tough on the incumbent. One of those situations did not go our way.”

Barich says the company took the loss in stride—a

reaction made possible, in all likelihood, by the “funny way” CDM NY diversified its therapeutic portfolio. Three of the agency’s most robust growth areas happen to be rare disease, professional OTC and oncology. Good luck in attempting to connect the dots from one of those to the others.

“And our fastest-growing department, by far, is analytics,” he continues. “That’s one of the great things about being a company like this. The people who work here are hungry for new and different experiences, and for the most part we’re able and willing to support them.”

—Larry Dobrow



AT THE HELM

Left to right: Kyle Barich, President; Lori Klein, managing partner and director of client services; Chris Palmer, managing partner and executive creative director

PERFORMANCE

Robust growth especially in rare disease, professional OTC and oncology

HIGHLIGHTS

Added several West Coast clients, among them Gilead Sciences, ACADIA Pharmaceuticals and Quest Pharmaceuticals

Clients taking advantage of CDM NY’s “cross-functional expertise” include Abbott Diagnostics, Takeda and Pfizer

CHALLENGES

Maintaining corporate identity while going bicoastal

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A to Z, beginning on page 183