

100  
AGENCIES



**AT THE HELM**

Neil Foster, marketing president

**PERFORMANCE**

Revenues near \$7 million in 2014, up almost 40% over the previous year

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Created a new division in Las Vegas, Forward Digital Media, and a second shop, 7West Communications

Hired Lori Johnson to oversee medical communications

**CHALLENGES**

Deciding which business to chase and which to let pass

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

“OUR CORE BUSINESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN AND WILL ALWAYS BE CREATIVE AND CONTENT DEVELOPMENT.”

—NEIL FOSTER

## GCG HEALTHCARE

Bigger budgets from a recovering pharma industry spell internal growth for this Texas agency



As healthcare marketing continues its transition into the digital age, a new type of ad agency has sprung up. It tends to be long on technology, gadgets and the latest buzzwords but short on a history of actually generating and developing creative concepts and content. This is where GCG Healthcare, founded in 1973, can differentiate itself, according to marketing president Neil Foster. “I think our core business has always been and will always be creative and content development.”

Which is not to say GCG does not have a firm grasp on the digital market. In fact, its existing clients have been asking for so many digital projects in recent years that the agency created a new division in Las Vegas, called Forward Digital Media, to handle the overflow.

Another area of internal growth for the agency has been in medical communications, that is, peer-to-peer messaging among HCPs, publication planning, speaker coordination, etc. This area too has grown so rapidly that GCG opened a second shop, called 7West Communications, to keep pace with extra demand.

In 2014 the agency hired Lori Johnson, PhD, to

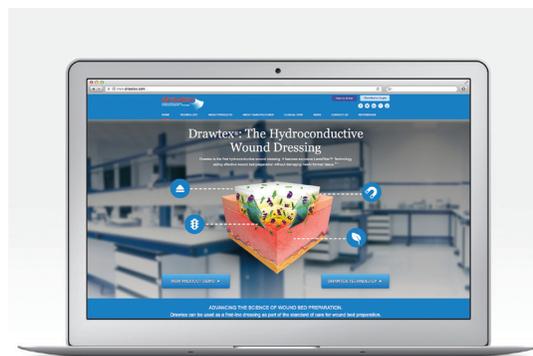
oversee the medical-communications part of the business. Trained in biomedical science, Johnson previously worked at Galderma Laboratories in Fort Worth, coordinating commercial and medical strategies for its dermatology products.

Almost all this growth—GCG experienced a 40% spike in revenue in 2014—has been driven by expanding services for its existing clients, notes Foster. “Our clients like to have a one-stop shop, so to speak,” he explains. “So these companies were created to help serve their needs. It was a question of either sending these clients away to another company or building those capabilities within ourselves.”

The big trend in 2014 was an almost across-the-board willingness among clients to increase marketing budgets, says Foster. “We saw a nice increase from 2013 to 2014, which we always like to see. It’s telling. I think the industry is coming back a little.”

Increased business means more hiring and GCG saw its head count rise by eight in the past year or so, from 24 to 32. Finding and keeping new talent is not the only challenge. The agency also has to be mindful of client perceptions when dealing with new faces. “A lot of times the reason a client hires you is because of the people involved in the pitch. So the last thing you want to do is have to hire a bunch of new people to accommodate that extra business. That does not make the client happy.”

Hence a big challenge moving forward is deciding what business to chase and what to let pass by, he says. “It’s important to keep the right people on the right accounts. It’s a people business. It literally is. That is what we are selling.”



Above left: GCG Healthcare’s work for Blue Lizard sunscreen. Above: Drawtex hydroconductive dressing

Staying nimble enough to accommodate the different workflow rhythms of digital marketing also requires constant diligence, he says. “What all of us kind of enjoy about the digital side of the business is that it is measurable. So you can manage client expectations better, because numbers are numbers. But that also means you have to make changes and optimize things on the fly quicker because the results are more immediate. And the challenge is it’s all moving very, very fast all the time.”

—Frank Celia