

**100
AGENCIES**



AT THE HELM

Nancy Beesley, partner and chief medical officer, and Kerry Hilton, president and CEO

PERFORMANCE

Revenues: \$10.1 million in 2014

HIGHLIGHTS

New clients in 2014 included the Medicines Co., Luminex, Biotissue, Pearson, Astute Medical, Gore Medical, Invisalign and Schumaker

Acquired Chicago's Topin & Associates

CHALLENGES

Recruiting digital talent is a snap but traditional hires are harder

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

“WE ARE IN THE MOST INTERESTING PARADIGM EVER IN THE WAY PEOPLE AND PATIENTS ARE INFORMED. AND AGENCIES THAT UNDERSTAND THAT ARE USING BIG DATA AT THE RIGHT TIME IN THAT DECISION CYCLE.”

—NANCY BEESLEY

**HCB
HEALTH**

Hello, Chicago! says an Austin agency



In July 2014 HCB Health found itself in a shootout for client Alcon Surgical, facing off against four big agencies. “Here we are, an independent in Texas, pitching against big New York shops. And we beat them,” says Nancy Beesley, partner and CMO of the Austin-based shop, who calls the win one of the high points of an already-strong year. “It was exciting because incumbents rarely keep business. And it was so gratifying to know that we were able to articulate the better strategy.”

But that was just one of several big scores for the agency, which prides itself on its institutional love for breakfast tacos, advertising outlaws and quirky apps. It’s winning accolades for PoopMD, an app developed with a pediatric gastroenterologist at Johns Hopkins University that lets parents photograph diaper contents to check on their babies’ liver health.

Revenues rose to \$10.1 million in 2014, says Kerry Hilton, partner and CEO, and the agency added such new clients as the Medicines Co., Luminex, Biotissue, Pearson, Astute Medical, Gore Medical, Invisalign and Schumacher.

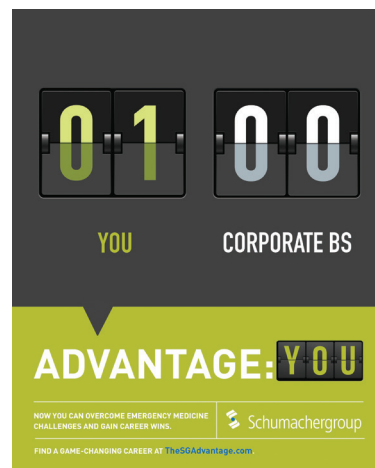
HCB also wrapped up the acquisition of Topin & Associates, a 33-year-old Chicago agency that

Hilton says will take revenues closer to \$15 million this year. While recruiting digital talent to Austin—with South by Southwest and its thriving start-up culture—is a snap, traditional hires have been harder. Besides offering more for clients, Hilton thinks HCB’s “second home in the Second City” will strengthen the 65-person shop’s skills across the board. “We like to think of it as Chicago and Austin being two different floors in the same building,” he says. “Chicago has a robust talent pool, and so we want to make it a fluid process.”

Notable campaigns include a global push for Alcon, aligning the organization around its advanced solutions in cataract surgery.

Beesley and Hilton say that, so far, 2015 is shaping up to be more active. “We’re seeing consolidation in the industry and that does two things,” Hilton says. “First, it constricts clients and customers wanting to move forward. And then it releases a fair amount of activity for communications. In 2014 we saw that really accelerate for a lot of big clients and our new-business pipeline is really full. We think 2015 will be an even better year for us, as clients let go and are willing to invest.”

The agency’s offices are in a building that houses a new-business incubator. That tech energy is influencing just about every strategy HCB develops. Hilton says the agency has invested more in digital people, teams and strategy than in any other aspect. “Digital is not a media,” he notes. “It’s not something to be thought of after a strategy has been developed.”



Above left: HCB Health’s PSA poster for colonoscopy awareness. Above: Its Schumacher Group journal ad

“We are in the most interesting paradigm ever in the way people and patients are informed,” adds Beesley. “Agencies that understand that are using big data at the right time in that decision cycle. It’s so different from the way things used to be done, when we just put a message out there and told people what to think. It’s exciting but it’s also uncharted, and that means there’s trepidation and some fear.”

—Sarah Mahoney