

100 AGENCIES



AT THE HELM

Left to right: Executive team members Jennifer Campanaro; Janelle Starr; Nadine Leonard; Bill Drummy, founder and CEO; Lee Slovitt; and James Talerico

PERFORMANCE

Retained 100% senior staff and 90% overall, post-takeover

HIGHLIGHTS

Added a dozen new companies and brands

AOR for Galderma

CHALLENGES

Becoming the A-list AOR digital player it considers itself

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

“BUT WE WON TREMENDOUS CONFIDENCE WITH THE WORK WE’VE DONE. THERE’S A REAL BELIEF IN THE QUALITY OF OUR THINKING.”

—BILL DRUMMY

HEARTBEAT IDEAS & HEARTBEAT WEST

A transition year wrought rejuvenation



When longtime independent Heartbeat Ideas was snapped up by holding company heavyweight Publicis Healthcare Communications Group in October 2013, the question wasn't whether Publicis had made a smart purchase (spoiler: It had indeed—more on that in a bit). Rather, it was about how Heartbeat would respond to its new status as one entity among many. After all, any number of nimble independent-minded firms have found their identities completely subsumed in the wake of an acquisition by a holding company.

Thus industry eyes were trained upon Heartbeat Ideas during 2014, waiting to see whether its approach and culture would survive the type of transition that has felled many a similar company. The good news? The agency was so busy during the end stretch of 2014 that it needed to bring in 50 freelancers to keep up with demand. Additionally, as of May 2015, Heartbeat had retained 100% of its senior staff and 90% overall, which is borderline unprecedented in situations such as this. Head count sits steady at around 115.

The bad news? Uh, the re-IP-ing process was kind of a drag. “To get on Publicis’s networks, we had to reassign IP numbers for every device in the company. That wasn’t fun,” deadpans founder and CEO Bill Drummy.

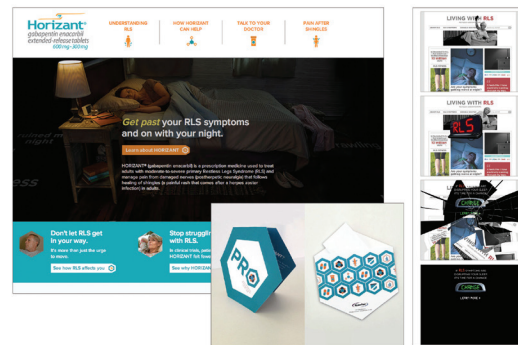
Closing in on two years since the acquisition by Publicis, then, Heartbeat remains very much what

it’s always been—which isn’t to say there weren’t bumps along the way. “I’d describe 2014 as a year of transition and integration,” Drummy says. “Learning how to be a part of a larger organization, getting the friction out of the system—there’s not a handbook that you follow. But I think we figured it out.”

Asked to give pointers for other agencies that might find themselves in a similar situation, Drummy and Janelle Starr, SVP and GM of Heartbeat West, laugh knowingly. Drummy stresses the importance of active investment in maintaining an existing culture. “This means spending money and time doing things that don’t look on the surface like they’re returning an economic result immediately,” he explains. Starr, on the other hand, says, “The really big part is doing well as a company. If you’re Publicis, you think, ‘Hey, they’re doing great. Let’s let them keep doing what they’ve been doing.’”

From that perspective, Heartbeat lived up to its side of the bargain. The aforementioned spike in freelancers was prompted by what Drummy calls “some of the fastest work I’ve done in my career.” A client phoned in late October asking for a quick sit-down about a brand. Heartbeat came out of that meeting with a mandate to design, build and go live with a campaign before the year was out. “We eliminated holidays,” Drummy jokes.

On the new-business front, Heartbeat added “five or six major new companies and brands—substantial stuff, not tiny little things,” Drummy says. Its relationships with Galderma (Heartbeat serves as digital AOR for seven dermatology brands), Abbott (project work on diabetes brands) and AstraZeneca (AOR for Bydureon and Byetta) remain strong,



AOR work for Sientra (above left) aimed directly at consumers. Above: AOR efforts for relaunch of Xenoport’s Horziant

and the company continues to take big steps towards gaining the rep as an A-list AOR player (as opposed to a digital specialist) it has long coveted.

“It’s a bit of a chicken/egg problem. Nobody wants to give you a certain type of assignment until you’ve already had that certain type of assignment,” Drummy says. “But we won tremendous confidence with the work we’ve done. There’s a real belief in the quality of our thinking.”

—Larry Dobrow