



AT THE HELM
Al Topin, president

PERFORMANCE
Revenue between \$5 million and \$10 million, up about 10% from 2013

HIGHLIGHTS
Became part of HCB Health

Won AOR assignment for Baxter Healthcare as well as three prelaunch products for The Medicines Company

CHALLENGES
Complete successful integration into HCB

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

TOPIN & ASSOCIATES, AN HCB HEALTH COMPANY

Veteran Chicago shop has a new parent



For the past several years 33-year-old Chicago shop Topin & Associates jointly pitched business and worked closely with Austin-headquartered HCB Health. HCB officially acquired Topin & Associates in early 2015. “We’d been working on the acquisition for quite a while,” explains Al Topin, who is president of the Chicago office. “We’re now called Topin & Associates, an HCB Health Company. Over time we’ll become HCB, but we’re still a freestanding agency with our own P&L and all the resources of a freestanding agency, which was part of what [both agencies] desired.”

Topin & Associates’ revenue was in the \$5-million to \$10-million range. Topin says it was up about 10%.

New business highlights included a US AOR assignment from Baxter Healthcare on its SIGMA Spectrum Infusion System (IV pumps), plus project-based corporate work. The agency had worked with Baxter before but not in recent years.

Vermillion, which awarded US-based project work on its OVA1 blood test, was also new. And it won US project work on three prelaunch products from The Medicines Company, another new client.

Since the HCB acquisition, account management is centralized in one office or the other. Both offices

share resources—including talent—as necessary.

“Topin & Associates has historically had strength in pharma, and we continue to focus on it,” Topin says. “HCB has a strong history with devices as well as pharma, so together we span most categories. Our clients are very much interested in learning about HCB, meeting its people, and understanding our additional resources.”

In terms of industry trends, Topin says many new business assignments continue to be large ongoing projects on a segment of a brand rather than traditional AOR assignments.

“The starting point is not insignificant, but it’s a project on a portion of the brand’s marketing and tactical plan,” he explains. “There are AOR assignments out there, and we’re involved in them, but it has shifted. Clients are continuing to parcel out assignments in portions, and parcel out budgets by the quarter. The Medicines Company win is an assignment to launch, but it doesn’t include every aspect of the launch. This seems to be more common. Over time, assignments like that can shift and you might gather more work on brand.”

Though assignments might be fragmented, Topin says divisions between digital and traditional work continue to dissolve. He also notes client interest in analytics—and not just ROI analytics—is continually increasing.

“We’re using analytics to better target customers and provide better focus for our clients’ sales forces,” he explains. “Of course, both of those eventually result in better ROI, but it starts with ability to analyze a broader spectrum of data.”

The two agencies are busy pitching this year while integrating cultures, systems and processes.

“The integration is happening fairly naturally because [HCB partner and CEO Kerry Hilton] and I have known each other and the two agencies

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—AL TOPIN



Above left: Integrated Medication Safety Solutions aid for Baxter International. Above: Promos for CitraNatal 90

have similar cultures,” Topin says. “Employees in both Chicago and in Austin are excited. If we hadn’t already known each other and hadn’t worked together, it might have been different.

“We’re telling the story of who we are and what we do to existing and new clients,” he adds. “It’s a big story—there’s more critical mass now for both agencies.”

—Tanya Lewis