

**AT THE HELM**

Michael Guarino, managing director, and David Garson, EVP and managing director

**PERFORMANCE**

Grew 20% year-over-year

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Launched Roche/Genentech's Actemra leading to work on Roche's MabThera (outside of US)

Changed management strategy from four managing directors to two

Added 12 people to staff, including Garson, MD, and Larry Lowe as VP, account supervisor

**CHALLENGE**

Managing growth

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 171

# Area 23

Three-year-old shop strikes gold with global and high-science launches



**A**rea 23 kicked off 2010 with the launch of Roche/Genentech's RA treatment Actemra, an assignment that included professional materials, patient communications and managed care elements, as well as campaign coordination across global markets.

Apparently Roche liked what it saw—the company's global division tapped the agency for a second brand, MabThera, a cancer drug sold outside of the US (Rituxan in the US). Michael Guarino, Area 23's managing director, called the MabThera business “a great win...which solidifies our role as a true global agency.” The agency also won a German assignment with Merz, for a metabolic drug called Hepa-Merz.

Part of the Interpublic Group network, and more specifically, a member of the Draftfcb Healthcare group of agencies, Area 23 is primarily a professional agency, though it does have a direct-to-patient group, and it's expanding, says Guarino. Overall, the agency grew by 20% year-over-year, won three new brands, and hired 12 people, according to Guarino.

Area 23 lost no accounts, unless you count Pfizer's established products brands (including migraine drug Relpax and antibiotic Zmax); that portfolio was used to launch a brand new IPG agency, called NeON, in September 2009, according to Dana Maiman, president and CEO at Draftfcb Healthcare. Pfizer brands were not

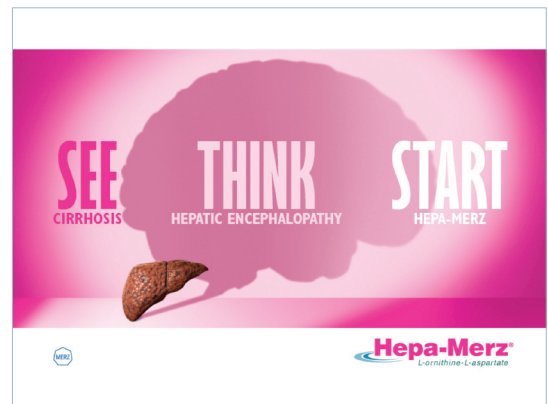
the only asset picked off by NeON—the newbie shop also stole two managing directors from Area 23: Melissa Cahill and Matt Lane. Steve Bateman, previously a managing director, is no longer with the company.

In May, however, Area 23 found a new EVP, managing director in David Garson, formerly a partner and creative at CementBloc. “We've had our eye on Dave for a long time,” says Guarino. The agency also brought in Larry Lowe to serve as VP, account supervisor. Lowe was formerly with HealthEd.

Guarino shies away from being called a niche agency, but says Area 23 does have a strong global capability. “We do have a significant amount of experience executing global launches, as well as experience with high science brands,” says Guarino. “That we're able to launch these [high science] brands and manage the REMS programs that come with them, I think that is a benefit for us and our clients.” Guarino says the agency has differentiated itself, but also hasn't backed into any corners, service-wise.

Speaking of REMS, or Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies, Guarino says FDA will continue to assign them to brands as part of the approval process, and not just for biologics. “Understanding the data implications, as well as the physician communications portion of [REMS] is something our medical and strategic planning services group comes to bear on, and they work closely with the account and analytics teams to turn [REMS] into something that's manageable,” says Guarino.

In terms of core business strategy, Guarino and Maiman both agree that aligning the dialogue between patients and physicians is a golden ticket. “You can't develop research and communications in silos and then



**Above:** A professional ad for Merz's Hepa-Merz, a metabolic drug; **Top:** Part of a journal ad for Welchol

wonder why physicians don't understand the patient, and why the patient isn't talking to the physician in the right way,” says Guarino.

One of the biggest challenges for the agency going forward, according to Guarino, is managing growth. “Making sure we stay true to who we are, a mid-size agency that can integrate and deliver multi-channel solutions, continues to be a challenge,” he said.

—Ben Comer

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