



AT THE HELM

John Puglisi, president and managing partner

PERFORMANCE

Revenue up 7% in 2009

HIGHLIGHTS

Picked up first AOR assignment, for Gloucester Pharmaceuticals' Istodax

Added Smith & Nephew, Eisai, Pfizer and Boehringer Ingelheim to roster

Headcount remained steady, but a few market analyst and research staffers were added

Oncology division kicked into gear

CHALLENGE

Agency consolidation

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

“Sometimes you’re on the receiving end [of agency consolidations] and sometimes you’re not”

—John Puglisi

Beacon Healthcare Communications

Shop’s three-pronged approach was expanded to five, resulting in some gains

Beacon Healthcare Communications spent 2009 working to be really, really good at a whole bunch of different things. And if that summary sounds like a cop-out—after all, it’s not like there are too many agencies out there dead-set on being merely OK—it’s intended as an affirmation of sorts: That a middle-sized, bureaucracy-free agency, by carefully picking its spots and its people, can surge in the face of challenging market conditions.

Beacon has long had a three-pronged approach, focusing its energies on the professional, consumer and managed-care areas. A few years back, agency co-founders John Puglisi and Tim Millas started to branch beyond this, adding an interactive arm. In October 2008, it expanded further via an oncology division, which started to kick into gear in 2009.

“It’s a nice little business, but it is a tough arena,” Puglisi says. “Whether it’s a Big Pharma company or a little start-up, clients want to make sure they have smart, experienced people working on their business. You don’t have time to train people. You have to have the horses to stay in the game.”

Within a few months, the oncology arm picked up its first AOR assignment, for Gloucester Pharmaceuticals’ cutaneous T-cell lymphoma treatment Istodax. Puglisi believes the firm’s branding work contributed to Istodax’s successful launch, which in turn helped Gloucester get acquired by Celgene.

Of course, in the post-acquisition agency shuffle,

Celgene reassigned the account elsewhere. Rather than be upset or frustrated, however, Puglisi sounds almost philosophical about the loss. “Listen, sometimes you’re on the receiving end and sometimes you’re not. These things happen. I think we were a little different from what they were accustomed to,” he shrugs.

That work, however, helped Beacon lure a host of new clients and new assignments from existing ones. A pitch led by the agency’s interactive arm helped nab Smith & Nephew as a client, to promote its Supartz joint fluid therapy. Beacon also added Eisai, Pfizer and Boehringer Ingelheim to its roster.

As a result, the firm jumped revenues 7% in 2009—a lower rate of growth than in the past, but still impressive, given market realities. “We’re fortunate to be very profitable. We grew and we didn’t have any layoffs,” Puglisi notes.

While Beacon’s headcount remains about what it



Above: An unbranded ad about chronic dry eye from Allergan, instructing patients to talk to a pharmacist

was at this time last year—85 or so—Millas says that the absence of growth is somewhat deceptive: “The size in terms of the number has remained consistent, but that doesn’t mean we have the same 85 people. We’ve actually grown quite a bit, we think.”

Beacon boasts ambitious plans for expansion in the months ahead. Look for the firm to grow via acquisition, with med ed and additional interactive muscle topping the target list. By the time 2010 wraps, Puglisi expects to see revenue growth between 10-12%.

—Larry Dobrow