

# Digitas Health

Digital shop's growth continues to explode with 11 new accounts



**“When you have a health problem, it becomes the single most important thing in your life at that moment”**

—David Kramer

It's probably safe to assume at this point that digital service offerings, across multiple channels, are a necessity for any agency hoping to compete for and win pharmaceutical accounts.

However, digital is as digital does, and creating meaningful, accessible content for customers, whether they're doctors, patients or “someone in between,” as CEO David Kramer tells it, is where the rubber meets the road.

“When you have a health problem, it becomes the single most important thing in your life at that moment,” says Kramer. “How you deal with that as a consumer is changing literally moment by moment.”

If revenue growth is a measure of success, Digitas Health managed to keep up with this capricious new consumer last year. The agency reports a 49% growth year-over-year, and that on top of a nearly \$100 million base, according to Michael du Toit, EVP, client service & new business.

Eleven new accounts were won during the same period, although specific brands could not be disclosed, per contractual obligations with clients. The agency

works with most of the top 10 pharmaceutical companies globally—including AstraZeneca, Merck, Novartis, Sanofi-Aventis, Pfizer and Roche—and also picked up a medical device or two this year. Du Toit says diversification was a key business strategy last year. “Historically, we were very good at organic growth,” he says. “We’ve looked to expand our client roster.”

To accommodate dramatic growth over the last couple of years (headcount has nearly doubled since 2008), the agency currently employs 658 people across offices in New York, Boston, London and at the Philadelphia headquarters. Key hires include executive planning director Sue Manber, joining the agency from Lowe shop ICC Alchemy, Mark Miller, SVP strategy and analysis, from Epsilon, Matt McNally, SVP, Media, and Gautam Gulati, VP group director, who is heading up the agency's science and medicine group in New York, said Kramer, adding that the agency now has five full-time physicians on staff. June Dawson, formerly at Ogilvy Healthworld, leads Digitas Health Europe from the London office.

Asked to give an example of an interesting project from the last 12 months, Jim Burke, SVP marketing, began with a scenario common to many pharma companies.

“[The unnamed client] had limited resources, and a limited ability to hire additional sales reps,” said Burke, adding that the client was using all available reps for brands at a more lucrative stage in the life cycle, such as launch brands. Digitas Health was tasked with promoting those brands that lost direct sales rep support. “We built an elegant customer-focused platform that delivered support and services online to physicians, on demand,” says Burke.

According to Alexandra von Plato, EVP, chief creative officer, this shift toward a “digitally driven sales model” reflects an understanding that doctors are basically consumers too, and that they want information and services tailored to their preferences, like everyone else. That means communicating with a physician when, where and how they want to communicate. Kramer describes the shift as a transition from a selling model to a helping model, or “marketing as a service.”

Well and good, but what about actual drug sales? If doctors have to request samples themselves, won't quantities go down?

“It's the reverse,” says du Toit. “There is an increase of sample requisition,” he says, adding that sample quantities are usually a good indicator of script numbers, depending on the brand. “The experience we've had with our clients has been that sample consumption went up.”

Kramer, du Toit and von Plato all underscore the fact that Digitas Health has gained traction as an agency of record (AOR) shop, as opposed to a strictly digital services provider.

“If you look at the quantitative side, 30-40% of our business is AOR business, where we do television, print, relationship management and digital media,” says du Toit, adding that online media planning and buying services—including search, social media and mobile—

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**Above: Consumer print advertisement for AstraZeneca's Crestor which Digitas holds the AOR assignment for**

are a key selling point for clients looking for the full AOR package. The agency has handled media across AstraZeneca's brand portfolio for several years, and (at press time) is involved in a pitch for Sanofi-Aventis' entire consolidated media account, an account previously held by ZenithOptimedia. Of the 11 accounts won last year, three were AOR assignments on either the consumer side or HCP side, and in some cases, both, according to du Toit. Von Plato describes the planning process as beginning with a blank sheet.

"The [creative] brief today has to start with how to help people become more informed and more confident consumers of healthcare," says von Plato. "Whatever creative and content ideas drive that, and whatever media is right for delivering those objectives, that is the media we pursue."



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Factors such as family history of early heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure can also contribute to plaque buildup

**Above: DTC spot for AstraZeneca's Crestor; Left: An educational website about the flu for MedImmune**

Kramer says the agency's planning function is being "re-engineered" this year. "We felt the need to be more of an enterprise strategist, at levels that required us to go back and redesign our strategy function," says Kramer.

Digitas Health continues to hold an AOR job on Crestor, AstraZeneca's blockbuster statin, and also handled digital assignments on a Seroquel XR consumer campaign AZ launched last December (TV and print ads were created by Saatchi & Saatchi Wellness). Other recent work includes an unbranded educational website for Daiichi-Sankyo and the Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation ([LivingWithDryness.com](http://LivingWithDryness.com)),

and an unbranded COPD effort for AZ featuring comedian and actor Robert Klein (RethinkCOPD.com) that launched earlier in 2009. The agency also created professional and consumer materials for Novo Nordisk's Victoza, a diabetes treatment, and did digital work for Pfizer/Boehringer Ingelheim's Spiriva, a COPD product. The agency lost no accounts last year, according to du Toit.

Given the degree of scrutiny FDA is leveling on drug promotions—and the resulting flurry of regulatory letters—Kramer is "pleased to say that none of our work has drawn any regulatory concerns." Digitas Health "takes regulations very seriously...we have a [regulatory] department with 17 people in it," says Kramer.

According to du Toit, Digitas Health recently won "a very big piece of business after two agencies before us did not or were not good at keeping up with regulatory requirements, and got into trouble with FDA." Kramer says FDA is asking questions for the first time, "because they know the internet is different." Bruce Grant, SVP, business strategy at Digitas Health, testified at FDA's social media hearings last November and presented original research on banner ad recall rates, and how consumers parse benefit and risk information with respect to online banners.

Von Plato says regulatory with respect to digital communication is a complicated process, and one the agency does well, based on a sizable investment in regulatory functions early on. "When you're doing a 500-page website, there's a much more complicated process involved, than when you're doing a 30-second [TV] spot," says von Plato.

Questioned about the importance of mobile devices to drug promotion, du Toit says the mobile market is more mature in Europe, for now. "It's much more easily accepted by clients in Europe, because it's simply what they do. In the US, we pursue mobile aggressively, just as we would any other channel that people are using," du Toit says. The advent of the iPad presents new opportunities, says du Toit, adding that the larger screen allows for "clicking through ads and getting directly into an [brand] experience." —Ben Comer



**AT THE HELM**  
David Kramer, CEO

## PERFORMANCE

Reports 49% growth year-over-year

## HIGHLIGHTS

Won 11 accounts and didn't lose any accounts

Launched unbranded educational website for Sjögren's Syndrome and unbranded COPD effort featuring actor Robert Klein

Created professional and consumer materials for Novo Nordisk's Victoza and did digital work for Pfizer/Boehringer Ingelheim's Spiriva

Continued work on its AOR assignment for AstraZeneca's Crestor

Headcount nearly doubled since 2008, including new hires Sue Manber, executive planning director; Mark Miller, SVP strategy and analysis; and Gautam Gulati, VP group editor

## CHALLENGES

Keeping digital work from drawing FDA regulatory concerns

Utilizing the iPad and other mobile channels

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