



AT THE HELM
Ryan Abbate, president

PERFORMANCE
Revenue up more than 15% to \$37 million

HIGHLIGHTS
Picked up four new accounts, including AOR work for Sanctura XR

Won promotional work on new Oncology Diagnostics division and expanded work with Allergan

Headcount up 17% to 165, with 10 openings needed to be filled

Productivity up 10%

CHALLENGE
Handling healthcare reform and social media

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 173

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—Ryan Abbate

Pacific Communications

Frugal firm saw revenue hit an upswing after careful preparation in 2009



After an apprehensive start to the year, Pacific Communications ended 2009 with revenue up more than 15% to about \$37 million and headcount up 17% to 165. President Ryan Abbate says he “circled the wagons” going into 2009 by being “extremely prudent with expenses,” and he feels fortunate to have spent the latter half of the year catching up with increased business.

“It was a really great surprise for us because everyone in the industry anticipated a down year, and I think most got a down year,” Abbate explains. “We reduced expenses at the end of 2008, so going into 2009 we were well positioned for volatility in billings. When that didn’t happen, the upswing was even bigger.”

Abbate says a number of clients are on the cash pay side, and they seemed relatively resilient. As the year proceeded, client sales and budgets increased in tandem.

“Clients generally exceeded expectations and so did we,” Abbate adds.

The agency picked up four new accounts, including an AOR assignment for joint promotion of Sanctura XR (overactive bladder) with Allergan Urology and Quintiles. The agency also won promotional work on Promethes’ new Oncology Diagnostics division, as well as the launch of three of its microRNA diagnostic products

for (ProOnc TumorSourceDx, ProOnc SquamousDx and ProOnc MesotheliomaDx). Other wins include Allergan Eye Care/Reimbursement Retina; Allergan Medical/Global Facial and Breast Aesthetics; strategic communications for enhanced Lap Band; and Allergan Medical Affairs. This year Pacific won various projects for endovascular company ev3.

Abbate feels its “little easier” to hire now because there are more people on the streets. He also sees employed talent looking for increased stability at work. Pacific has about 10 openings currently. A new creative director of copy, Grace Eriksen, was hired last year from Grey Healthcare.

Abbate is proud of his team, noting employee productivity was up nearly 10% last year.

Digital integration is something that Abbate believes “everyone is trying to sort out.” He notes that Pacific has been ahead of the curve, having integrated digital years ago.

“It didn’t make sense to us to cleave digital off,” he says. “The industry has now come around to that. Clients have seen that separating digital from your AOR is a mistake because invariably the digital piece [doesn’t have] the knowledge necessary to generate content against those products. To dissect digital... is of a bygone era because it’s ubiquitous now.”

Abbate sees digital as a force behind a “revolution in services and backend agency management.” He doesn’t think demarcation will exist between “digital agencies” and “traditional agencies” in the near future. “You’ll see very few shifts like this in your career,” he says. “It’s like in the late 1980s and early 1990s when everything



Above: A journal ad for Allergan’s Zymaxid; Left: Part of a direct marketing ad for Allergan’s Alphagan P

became computerized. It’s a similar shift.”

Pacific is pitching new business, and Abbate says revenue is already up about 10% over last year. “We try to be very calculated,” he explains. “We look for three to five pitches a year where we believe we have a pretty good chance. If we get 50%, we’d be very happy.”

Uncertainty about the impact of healthcare reform is top of mind for many clients, as is sorting out how to best use social media.

“It’s still an unsettled period,” Abbate says. “There are a lot of unknowns, which we’ll assess carefully and respond to accordingly.” —Tanya Lewis