

Sudler & Hennessey

Firm puts collaboration with clients, digital skills at the forefront of operations



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—Louisa Holland

After 76 years of servicing healthcare clients, Sudler & Hennessey, a true granddaddy of medical advertising, has pretty much seen it all. So, it’s going to take a lot more than a wobbly economy, a regulation frenzy and parching pipelines to knock it out of its stride.

“These are tough times and clients are really open to how they have to differentiate themselves as companies and brands,” says Louisa Holland, co-CEO, the Americas, at Sudler & Hennessey, “so I think they’re very much looking for collaboration with their agency partners.”

And that translates to a greater strategic role for the agency.

“Clients want us to produce less expensive tactics but more expansive thinking,” she says. “So, we’ve had to become bigger thinkers and more efficient doers. And because of that, we’ve reinvented how our teams work together, so we’re delivering on the best ideas across the entire health influence ecosystem.”

Internal, as well as external, collaboration has become a top priority at S&H and Holland firmly

believes that the best ideas come at the intersections between disciplines. “We’ve seen this in many other industries,” she says. “So, we spend a lot of time making sure that we are maximizing those intersections—that people know each other and work well together.”

Of course, all the collaborative harmony in the world is of little use if you don’t combine it with the necessary skills. And, increasingly, what clients want is digital, digital, digital. Is S&H, where Andy Warhol once plied his trade, fresh and nimble and relevant enough to keep up? You bet it is, says Holland.

“We are one of the pioneer healthcare agencies, so people might immediately assume, ‘Well, maybe they’re not that digital,’” she concedes. “But actually what it means is that we’ve been doing digital for a very long time—for almost 15 years—so it’s not new to us.”

Holland notes that while digital used to be the add-on, it is often now the driver of many other interactions. “This is a welcome change and we’ve embraced it,” she says. “We need to be leaders in this, so we focus on developing programs that work across the digital spectrum in a strategic way, not just repurposing content.”

However, Holland thinks that the pharma industry can be a little behind the curve when it comes to such integrated, collaborative approaches, and oftentimes requires a little education.

“Clients talk a lot about silo-busting but they still tend to purchase their marketing services in silos,” she notes. “What we have been talking to them about—and I think they’ve been increasingly receptive to our approach—is that they need to allow us to show them integrated work. We bring it in, whether they ask for it or not, and they can really see that when we work fluidly in these collaborative teams it really benefits the brand.”

So how well did S&H fare in 2009? Unfortunately, we’re not totally sure because, like so many others, WPP-owned S&H cannot reveal its revenues (\$100 million-plus) and staffing levels (700-plus). However, Holland insists that, globally at least, 2009 was a good year. “We accomplished our goals financially and things are continuing in a positive way for 2010,” she says, adding also that the agency “didn’t lose a single client.”

Unfortunately again, Holland would not reveal any information about the S&H account roster, but did confirm that there were wins, “one in oncology, which is particularly nice for us because we have an increasing focus and expertise in that area.”

Holland says her agency’s biggest achievement in the US was the launch of a major new product that was introduced with three indications simultaneously. “We had oversight for cross-functional leadership that included multiple agencies within our network,” she says. “We were developing communications initiatives for physicians, patients and payers.”

Holland notes that while S&H is doing a mix of work, some areas are growing quicker than others. “We’re certainly doing a lot more digital work, even though we’ve been involved in digital for many years,” she says. “We are developing patient work, relation-



AT THE HELM

Jed Beitler, CEO worldwide, with Louisa Holland and Rob Rogers, co-CEOs, the Americas

PERFORMANCE

2009 was a good year globally; “accomplished goals financially”

HIGHLIGHTS

Launched a major new product in the US that was introduced with three indications simultaneously

Added affiliate offices in Johannesburg and Moscow, acquired MDS Healthcare in Shanghai and Beijing (renamed Sudler MDS) and is collaborating with a company in Spain, CYS Sudler

Key hires: Jack Blakey, MD, Australia; Kenji Hanabata, MD, Japan; and Shane Kennedy, head of Sudler Digital

Promoted Max Jackson to CEO for EMEA and APAC, and John Marchese to EVP, director of account services

CHALLENGES

Producing less expensive tactics with more expansive thinking

Figuring out how healthcare reform will change the industry

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

ship marketing initiatives and engaging with payers. It’s become clear that the role of a payer—or the need to address the value of a product and increased access—is critical.”

Holland shares the CEO role for the Americas with Rob Rogers, while Max Jackson is (the recently promoted) CEO for Europe/Middle East/Africa (EMEA) and Asia Pacific (APAC). All three report to chairman and CEO worldwide Jed Beitler under a management structure has been in place for around two years.

Aside from the main S&H agency, the group also houses another full-service agency, Sentrix Global Health Communications and five medical education companies: HealthAnswers, Current Medical Directions, Precept Medical Education, IntraMed Educational Group and Sudler West. Sentrix is headed by recent hire VP, managing director, June Carnegie, and has a couple of offices in Europe and one in New Jersey, which is about to relocate to New York.

“Sentrix gives us the opportunity to provide clients with a different kind of team,” says Holland. “It has a smaller, focused, boutique feel, but with all the heritage of the mother ship.”

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Recent key hires include Jack Blakey, MD, Australia; Kenji Hanabata, MD, Japan; and Shane Kennedy head of Sudler Digital (“a strong digital strategist and a great team leader”). Notable promotions include the aforementioned Max Jackson and the appointment of John Marchese, a 10-year S&H veteran, to EVP, director of account services.



Above: A journal ad for Galderma's Vectical; Far left: Part of a professional ad for Galderma's Cetaphil

Holland says that while S&H is focused on growing its own talent, management tries to create a unique work environment in order to draw people in from other companies.

“Good talent is always hard to find, but we’re not finding it any harder today than it ever has been,” says Holland. “The range of talent out there is a little more interesting than in years past.

We put quite a bit of effort, energy and resources into ongoing training, so at any level there are a host



Above: An unbranded disease state awareness ad for breast cancers from Genentech BioOncology

of educational activities to support your growth.”

S&H pays special attention to younger staff members, and formed a group called the RevoluS&Hionaries, which meets every month and comes up with initiatives for improving the culture of the organization. Every couple of months they sit with co-CEOs Holland and Rogers to share their suggestions, and twice a year they meet with Beitler and Jackson and talk about global ideas.

“We’ve enacted about 75% of the ideas they’ve suggested,” says Holland. “They’ve gone from a group who were thinking ‘How would we ever have a voice here?’ to a group that now gets an audience with senior management—and they’re being listened to.”

Holland feels 2010 will be a good one for S&H with continued growth. “We like to do what Jed Beitler [worldwide CEO] calls ‘sticking to our knitting’—we stay focused on what we do best, and we do it at the highest possible level. We are making sure that we really deliver on [current clients’] needs and that satisfaction is at a very high level. And obviously we are going to continue to add business and pitch, and build our roster.”

Holland sees the pharma landscape continuing to change, with further downward pressure on cost. She is also wary of the effects of healthcare reform. “Nobody is sure where reform will go in the US,” she says. “But what we’ve seen in global markets already is budget cuts that reflect the pharma industry’s increased contributions to governmental health costs, and we’ve seen those budget cuts get passed down to agencies. What those pressures are may differ from country to country, but every country is facing them.

“Our challenge is that we need to be smart and we need to be more efficient.” —James Chase