



AT THE HELM

Peter Labadie, managing director

PERFORMANCE

"Slow but steady growth"

HIGHLIGHTS

Awarded five small wins, including work for the AMA and American Pharmaceutical Partners

Continuing work for Astellas, Medicis Aesthetics and won back professional and consumer duties for Abbott Medical Optics

Increasing digital work to about half of its business

CHALLENGE

Bouncing back after losing core client Smith & Nephew's Allevyn

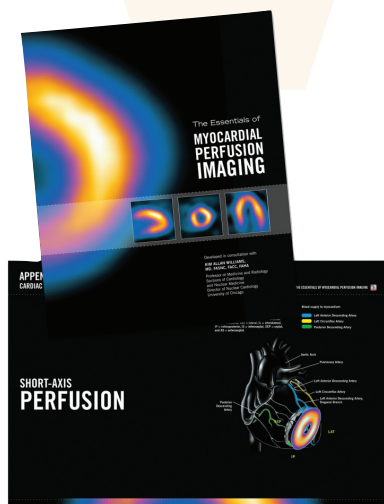
For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 173

"I could see a day down the road where every single thing we do is digital"

—Peter Labadie

Williams-Labadie

Small wins and increased digital work holds Chicago agency together



When the recession visited 57 W. Grand St.—the Chicago home of Williams-Labadie—in late 2008, it didn't pack up and leave until the latter half of 2009. The mark left by this unwanted guest was indelible, but not an altogether bad one.

"It was a struggle," acknowledges Peter Labadie, CEO, who was forced to lay off six. "I've been pleased to see...employee morale, which is key at agencies during tough times, has held together very well. We're stronger and tighter as a result."

Business has started to turn around, too, and the agency has eight or nine months of "slow but steady growth from a lower baseline," Labadie says. Revenue in 2009 was down only slightly from the year prior, and the agency has since hired back three of those let go. "This year's been way better than last year," he reports. "Year to date, we're way ahead."

That's due in part to five small wins; a diversified roster including professional, consumer and device work; and the firm's ability to hold onto most accounts. New arrivals include digital work for the American Medical Association and the US professional business for anesthetic Naropin from American Pharmaceutical Partners, plus two others Labadie declined to name.

The firm also won back the Abbott Medical Optics Blink Tears Lubricating Eye Drops account, which involves both professional and consumer duties.

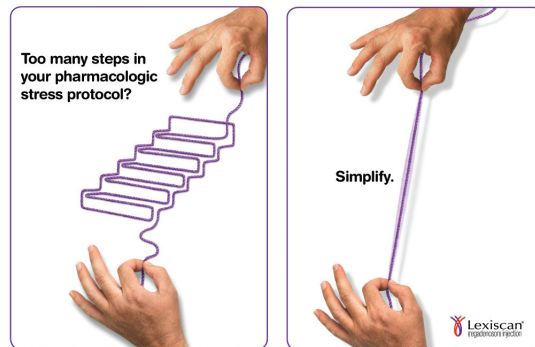
Departures in 2009 included SciClone Pharmaceuticals' immune system drug Zadaxin. Core client Smith & Nephew took away its wound-management product Allevyn. "I don't think people were shopping agencies," Labadie comments. "I think it was more a question of cutting their spending."

Another former client, deCode Genetics, went bankrupt before reemerging this year under private ownership. The losses followed the '08 patent expiry for blockbuster Prograf, a brand the agency had serviced for 15 years. The company behind Prograf, Astellas, is its longest-running account. Asked whether Astellas' \$4-billion takeover of OSI in May could yield additional work, Labadie says it's too early to tell.

For the most part, the CEO says his agency has been able to keep existing business steady or from declining too much: "We managed to do good work and hold onto some budget while keeping declines minimal." Activity from Astellas, Medicis Aesthetics and Abbott Medical Optics keeps the 49-person shop busy.

Its digital work, which now accounts for about half of business, is tracking upward. "The last year and first five months of this year have been an amplification of that [trend]," says Labadie, adding, "I could see a day down the road when every single thing we do is digital. It's heading in that direction, driven by clients."

That trend is a double-edged sword, though. Labadie says clients increasingly expect that with digital mar-



Above: Professional ads for Astellas' Lexiscan; Top: Unbranded disease state awareness ads for MPI

keting, they should be able to "do more with less and save money, but at the same time not reduce visibility in their target audience of HCPs or consumers, and possibly extend reach," he observes. "That's a challenge all of us face."

Being part of the Publicis Healthcare Communications Group makes it easier to execute targeted, analytics-based promotional campaigns. PHCG "has highly developed tools now in place across the network to bring the digital approach to life," he says.

The goal for Williams-Labadie now is to recapture momentum. Says Labadie: "We can come back, and we think we're on our way to doing it."

—Marc Iskowitz