



AT THE HELM

Mark Goble, COO, and Joe Kuchta, president/CEO

PERFORMANCE

Revenue hit all-time high of \$21.4 million

HIGHLIGHTS

Acquired The Willow Group

Grew with long-time clients ProStrakan Group, Upsher-Smith and Phadia AB

Senior team additions include group creative directors, director of digital marketing technology and chief innovation officer

CHALLENGE

Helping people understand social media uses

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 169

GA Communications Group

Acquisitions, rebranding and organic growth help to shape up a stellar year



It was record year for Chicago-headquartered GA Communications Group (formerly Goble & Associates Healthcare Communication)—revenue hit an all-time high of \$21.4 million. It was also an evolution year—the agency rebranded; a San Diego digital shop acquired in late 2009 was integrated; and healthcare research and consulting firm The Willow Group was acquired.

“The rebranding gives us the flexibility to bring in other companies without changing core positioning,” says CEO Joe Kuchta. “We’ll continue to look for other services we can bring into the fold. I’m not trying to create a Publicis or Omnicom network. We’re thinking about what we need to be not just next year but five years from now. We don’t worry so much about being labeled. We’re a communications company, and we’ll help communicate anyway we can. Every agency needs to be well versed in every channel possible.”

One of the secrets to GA’s success has been its remarkably stable client base. Kuchta says clients’ businesses are growing, and the agency is growing with them.

“Every year we add a couple of new things and with our digital capability we’ve added business across the

board with almost every client,” he adds. “It’s been nice for them and us.”

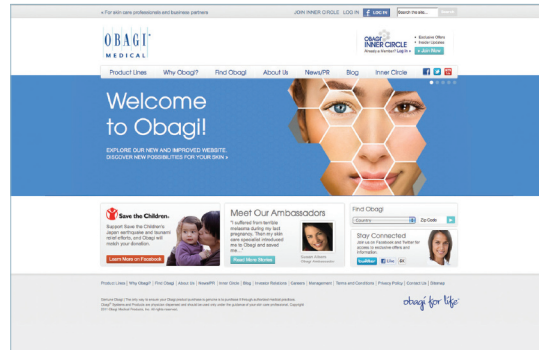
Senior management additions included new group creative directors Bil Boyd and Misty Castaldi. Ben Currie also joined as director of digital marketing technology (a newly created position). Geoff Melick was hired as chief innovation officer early this year.

Long-term clients awarding new work in 2010 included ProStrakan Group; Upsher-Smith Laboratories; and Phadia AB. Kuchta notes Phadia work includes a DTC program for a peanut allergy molecular test.

Other new assignments included branding and digital work on Can-Am Care’s Dex4 (glucose tablets available in retail); relaunch of Mylan Institutional’s Ultiva (analgesic adjunct to anesthesia); and strategic positioning for SureGene, a company that’s developing molecular diagnostic tests to improve care of people with serious mental illness. GA also won all online consumer and HCP materials for Obagi Medical Products.

“Social media is here to stay,” Kuchta notes. “Every client wants to know what it is and how they can use it. Facebook is becoming a pretty good targeting tool. Key for us is to help people understand it’s just a channel to get to people in ways we couldn’t before.”

He continues: “It’s much more of an interaction than a push out, and we take advantage of that. We have people blogging every day on behalf of our clients. Message is still key—whether people are online or on phones, it’s still about targeting and message. Our clients appreciate common sense and simplicity.



Above: A consumer website for Obagi Medical Products; top: Corporate identity information for Sakura

“Message is still key—whether people are online or on phones, it’s still about targeting and message”

—Joe Kuchta

There’s nothing that complicated about it.”

Overall headcount is approaching 100, up from about 77 last year. Recruiting isn’t a problem—in fact, Kuchta says people knock on the door in Chicago every day. He’s hired 15 in the last few months and is training current employees to make sure no one is left behind. “We’re looking more outside the healthcare space as well,” he adds. “We’re just looking for good talent and good attitudes.”

The agency is working on new business this summer, and Kuchta notes revenue is on track to hit around \$22 million. “We’re integrating, not losing any business, and we’re growing,” he says. “We’re pretty darn happy.” —Tanya Lewis