

Harrison & Star

Co-founder turns over reins to protégé,
shop sees record year in revenue

“Clients are looking for a better offering and a more economical one. It’s a sign of the times”

—Ty Curran

After a quarter century in the spotlight of this Omnicom agency, Larry Star is assuming a new role. Star, who co-founded Harrison and Star back in 1986 with Tom Harrison, has delegated day-to-day operations to its longtime president, Ty Curran. Star will still be involved in strategic decision-making, at least for the next few years, as chairman of both H&S and BioLumina Group, the agency’s three-year-old sister shop.

“I feel like I’ve been given the keys to a Maserati,” says Curran, who had been president of H&S for seven years before being named CEO in January of Medical Specialist Communications Group, a mini holding company housing both agencies. If Curran’s now in the driver’s seat, Star will be the guiding light. “By no means is Larry cutting back,” insists Curran. “He still is an incredible force to be reckoned with. We’re very fortunate that he’s still around to provide us with his leadership, vision and mentorship.”

Star’s group forged that vision a decade ago. “We were the first agency to say we are the ‘specialty agency,’ and our clients now understand we are the so-called specialist agency,” says Curran. It’s a very simple business model that continues to bear fruit.

Last year was a record one for H&S and BioLumina, he says, both from a revenue and profit standpoint.

Both shops saw double-digit growth. “We were pleasantly surprised by our performance in 2010,” notes the new chief executive. “By no means did we think it would be as high as it was.”

True to form, H&S’ growth has been driven by specialist markets, audiences and brands. From Novartis in 2010 came the professional accounts for oncology compounds Gleevec and Tasigna, as well as the phase III JAK inhibitor INC424 for myelofibrosis. Bayer assigned its US and global Kogenate business for hemophilia (H&S already had the ex-US work), and the agency picked up Celgene’s anti-inflammatory and immunology (otherwise known as “INI”) franchise. Rounding out its list of 2010 wins was the professional AOR business for Beiersdorf OTC derm brand Eucerin.

The agency also extended further into longtime client Genentech with Roche’s BRAF inhibitor vemurafenib (RG7204, PLX4032), in phase III for melanoma, and its hedgehog pathway inhibitor vismodegib, in phase II for advanced basal cell carcinoma. Genentech’s BioOncology corporate campaign launched last year, courtesy of H&S, and roster brand Avastin, Genentech’s oncology blockbuster, added a gastric cancer indication this year and required a great deal of promotional work.

“They’re regarded as...the number one company in innovation, and we feel blessed and pleased to work with Genentech and Roche,” coos Curran. “They come up with these incredible brands, patient services and communications that just scream innovation.”

BioLumina has seen new work from Halaven,



Above: An ad for Bayer hemophilia care, the company is the maker of Kogenate FS to treat the disease

the new Eisai chemotherapy derived from the sea sponge. As AOR for Genentech’s Rituxan/hematology, it helped launch a new indication for the brand in chronic lymphocytic leukemia. And a campaign for Onyx designed to raise awareness of its proteasome inhibitor pipeline debuted at the 2010 American Society of Hematology meeting.

Curran reports no account losses. There have been some budget pull-backs but, “That’s throughout the whole industry,” he points out, adding that doing more with less has been his organization’s biggest challenge. Likewise, when asked about his shop’s greatest feat, Curran says it’s been providing the right level of



Left: A professional corporate ad for Genentech BioOncology, touting its offerings, including a robust pipeline (with 29 new molecules in clinical development); innovative molecules that target the fundamental mechanisms of cancer growth; and an extensive clinical trial program that is currently enrolling patients in 700 ongoing trials



AT THE HELM
Ty Curran, CEO and president

PERFORMANCE
Double-digit growth for H&S and BioLumina

HIGHLIGHTS
Ty Curran takes over the CEO reins from Star who steps into a chairman role

Awarded professional accounts for Gleevec and Tasigna from Novartis; US and global Kogenate business for hemophilia from Bayer; professional AOR work for Eucerin from Beiersdorf; and Celgene's anti-inflammatory and immunology franchise

Grew organically with Genentech on phase III melanoma product and hedgehog pathway inhibitor vismodegib

Launched Genentech BioOncology corporate campaign and a gastric indication for Avastin

Headcount up 10-20% over the past year

CHALLENGES
Global recession

Diminishing sales forces and scrutinized promotional spending

Continuing to grow

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

expertise to service clients.

"Working in the specialty arena really requires a more scientific and clinical understanding of the disease state, the data and the customer," he explains. "It takes a special type of agency professional to work in this field. We are blessed at H&S and BioLumina to have such talented professionals."

Helping them meet the test are a number of PhDs, medical writers and high-science staffers. "They play a significant role in the management of our brands," says Curran, "as clients ask for more understanding of data and science."

Overall headcount stands at 330 for H&S, and 100 for BioLumina—up about 10-20% over the past year—a growth curve Curran characterizes as "steady and hopefully rising."

Another part of the two agencies' success in landing big specialty accounts has been the strength of their global offering. "A majority of our brands have a global component, and that has changed significantly in the past five years," the CEO says. "Very rarely do we run into a client and it's a US assignment [only]."

Curran taps the Omnicom global network, partnering with UK-based Adelphi Group on a number of global assignments, including Bausch & Lomb, Roche and Novartis. This affords worldwide reach and coverage in everything from med ed and health outcomes to reimbursement, scientific communications and advertising.

How's business been in 2011? "We're off to a very fast start," Curran says. So far, H&S has drawn on its ophthalmology experience to land some new eye care brands from B&L and a couple of other unnamed wins.

"We are 100% focused on our existing business," Curran says. "Only by doing a great job on existing business will you be able to go after new business."

He also cites an uptick in CRM work and is gearing up his troops to do more. "Obviously with reps not having access to doctors, you need to look to non-personal communications," says Curran. As it turns out, leveraging CRM to get messages to pharma customers has proven

to be a unique, innovative and profitable way.

"We have developed a couple of incredible case studies for clients to show the ROI you get with these campaigns," he says.

The agency's CRM approach melds database marketing and digital with an analytics component to analyze communications effectiveness. Indeed, the back end is as important as the front. "I look at this as a way to increase the power of our messaging and the effectiveness of it, because the customer tells us what, by what channel and when they want to hear from us."

Curran says digital expertise is now integrated into the teams at H&S and BioLumina. He sees an integrated, multi-channel approach as "a huge part of our growth in the future."

As some other agencies try to position themselves as specialist shops, amid the loss of patent protection for many of the blockbuster primary care brands, Curran is thankful that his mentor, Star, set the agency on that course 10 years ago: "Every area has been hit, but this is one that maybe has not been hit as much as primary care."

Still, he's a realist. "There's a global recession out there," he observes. "Everyone has to adopt and reevaluate how we do business."

Clients, of course, have responded by cutting their sales forces and scrutinizing promotional spending. Curran says he's been somewhat surprised by the number of network consolidations occurring throughout the industry.

He sees that trend continuing: "From an efficacy standpoint, to have one network providing all disciplines is the way to go. Clients are looking for a better offering and a more economical one, as well. It's a sign of the times."

Of growth, he says, "It will be a challenge, no doubt about it—it's tough out there. But with the services we offer, our specialty focus and the quality of our people, this will position us very well for the future."

—Marc Iskowitz