



AT THE HELM

Roberto Ascione, founder and president

PERFORMANCE

US and worldwide growth about 25% year-on-year

HIGHLIGHTS

Won tablet business for AstraZeneca that was expanded; BMS awarded preferred digital agency status; developing projects for GE Healthcare

Merged with iMed Studios and acquired Digital District

Opening Shanghai office

CHALLENGES

Working in pan-Europe, it's one market but many countries

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

Publicis Healthware International

Global firm continues to grow through mergers with siblings and acquisitions

Combining his medical and marketing training, Roberto Ascione founded Healthware Consulting in Italy in 1996. Business grew first in Italy, expanded into European accounts, and the agency just kept growing from there. Publicis acquired it in 2007 and it became known as Publicis Healthware International (PHI) with Ascione at the helm as president.

The plan is to expand globally through mergers with Publicis siblings and through acquisitions. Last year was a big year on that front—PHI merged with sibling iMed Studios and acquired Dusseldorf-based Digital District.

Headquarters remain in Salerno, Italy, but PHI now has a New York City hub and offices in Paris, Dusseldorf, Milan, Rome, Ames, IA, and Yardley, PA. Kristin Milburn leads US operations.

Worldwide headcount is 124. The iMed Studios merger helped increase US headcount to 38, up from 7 in 2009 (it's 40 now). Business is split about evenly between the US and the rest of the world (Europe is 45%; Asia Pacific is 5%). Ascione reports both US and worldwide growth of about 25% year-on-year.

PHI has three main units—digital, consulting and eBusiness Solutions, which develops software applications for everything from clinical trials to earnings.

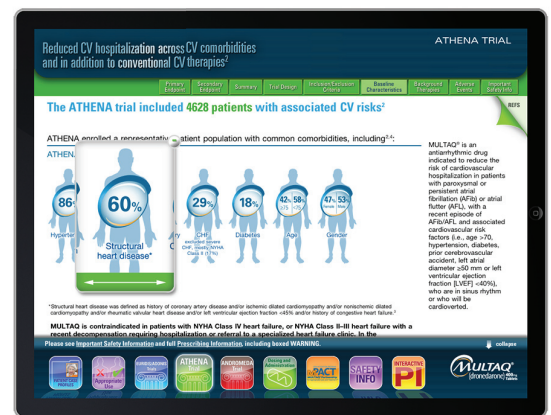
“We’re putting a lot of attention on digital innova-

tion,” Ascione says. “We’re focused on being into the innovation and bringing it back to clients in a way that will be viable and actionable. Other industries, like financial services and travel, have completely changed because of digital. We see healthcare going there.”

Last year, AstraZeneca awarded tablet business for its heart drug Brilinta (US) that expanded to include creative control of the brand assets and guidelines. BMS EMEA awarded preferred digital agency status (multiple countries), and GE Healthcare nominated PHI as a preferred supplier for HCS/EMEA creative agency services. Ascione says the GE relationship is unfolding in a number of projects in multiple countries.

Within four weeks of the iPad launch, PHI had developed a program for Shire reps. It also completed a large digital consultancy project for all Sanofi brands in a major non-US market. He says PHI delivered “a three year roadmap for embracing digital at all levels of the organization.” And, PHI won and launched a program that includes hydrofiber.com for ConvaTech in 16 countries.

“The US market is more developed in terms of embracing digital faster,” Ascione notes. “The adoption curve is fairly fast because you mostly have a homogenous language, etc. Pan-European growth is limited because, while it’s one market to some extent, it’s not one country.



Above: A tablet app for the Athena trial for Sanofi's Multaq, for people who have had AFib or AFlutter

“If you want to work pan-European you have to be highly structured and have high level strategy,” he continues. “It forces you to be more inventive. The number of physicians in Europe is probably comparable to the US, but they’re in different countries with different regulations. We wanted to create a global company versus a network of different shops because having one company with one leadership creates the most favorable environment to cross pollinate across countries.”

PHI will open a Shanghai office in June. Ascione also wants to expand in the UK and Brazil.

“One key strategy is to help clients embrace digital more, and as they grow, we grow with them,” he adds. “Of course, we’ll also keep moving with new clients.”

—Tanya Lewis

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