



#### AT THE HELM

Peter Nalen, president and CEO (top middle), and Kristin Keller, EVP (bottom middle), lead the Compass bunch

#### PERFORMANCE

Grew 20% last year

#### HIGHLIGHTS

Won products for Actelion; Dey's Performist; and Azur Pharma's Elestrin

Underwent "soft rebranding" to re-establish its focus on patients

Opened a second office in San Francisco

#### CHALLENGES

Lost Eisai's CTCL brands

Growing new office

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**"It's not easy when your clients are getting redefined...but at least we've got a great track record"**

—Kristin Keller

# Compass Healthcare Marketers

A second office in the Bay Area and 'soft rebranding' round out positive year



**F**ounded in 2003 by Peter Nalen, president and CEO, and Kristin Keller, EVP, to focus on the patient experience in the rare and orphan disease space, Compass Healthcare Marketers underwent a "soft rebranding" in 2010 to reestablish its focus on patient empowerment.

According to Nalen, the agency evolved its positioning "from serious and chronic conditions to a patient-focused agency in the rare disease state," adding, "it's more of an evolution than a revolution."

Nalen's professional involvement in the rare disease state actually stemmed from a very personal experience: In 1989, his brother found a pea-sized lump in his neck that was identified as benign. When his brother returned to the doctor's office a mere three months later, by which time the lump had increased to the size of a lemon, he was diagnosed with a rare malignant tumor called Liposarcoma, which eventually took his life.

"That was back before the internet and you just didn't have any information," Nalen explains, looking back on this difficult and frustrating time. "I just remember for years we were reading books, and researching everything we could to get information so we could make more informed decisions. In serious and chronic conditions, that's kind of what the patient experience is like."

"We saw that in the rare disease and orphan drug space, that feeling is magnified 100-fold, and we said, 'That's a space we would really like to play in,'" says Nalen of his and Keller's initial draw to this sector.

In addition to a rebranding, 2010 brought for Compass the opportunity to open a second office in San Francisco—which contributed to the shop growing 20% last year. "A lot of biotech and specialty pharmaceutical companies are out here," says Keller, who relocated to the west coast last September. "[I]f you look at the future of the orphan disease space—outside of big pharma developing their own orphan division—much of the innovation is still going to continue to happen within the biotech community in California, and in the West Coast in general. So, it made absolute sense for us to establish a presence out here."

Accounts won last year include: Performist, an inhaler from Dey Pharma for the treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD); Prometheus Labs' metastatic melanoma drug Proleukin; menopause drug Elestrin, by Azur Pharma; and, Orphan Europe's Carbaglu, for the treatment of hyperammonaemia, to name a few. The agency also lost an account with Eisai in 2010, for CTCL (cutaneous T-cell lymphoma) brands Targretin and Ontak. "They scaled back to nothing, from a marketing perspective," says Keller.

So far in 2011, Compass has won a new account with Actelion Pharmaceuticals for a number of products: pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH) drugs Tracleer and Veletri, as well as the brand Zavesca, for the treatment of type 1 Gaucher's disease (a disorder which affects organs and tissues).



**Above: Consumer site for Actelion's Zavesca; top: Websites and patient materials for Ipsen's Incorex**

The agency's goals for the year ahead include growing the San Francisco office (total staff headcount is now at just over 30) and generating client and patient awareness on the breadth of services the shop has to offer.

A persistent challenge for the agency, Keller admits, is that the nature of working with innovative pharmas in the rare disease space inevitably leads to acquisition by big pharma.

"It's not always easy when your clients are getting redefined a little bit," she says, "but at least we've got a great track record of staying with our brands."

—Lauren Folino