



AT THE HELM

Al Topin, president

PERFORMANCE

About 8% growth last year

HIGHLIGHTS

Added clients to its Myriad Genetics portfolio, including assignments for OnDose and the BRACAnalysis

Chosen to develop a physician outreach program for the Alzheimer's Association

CHALLENGES

Dealing with the marginalization of agencies

Developing a broader approach to deal with the "new normal"

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 181

"Strategy, messaging and branding still come first"

—Al Topin

Topin & Associates

Expanding relationships were the basis of a "solid year" for the agency



Topin & Associates had what president Al Topin calls a "solid year" in 2011, with about 8% growth. "This year feels better and stronger," he says. "Clients have a lot of plans, it's a question of whether they execute on all of them. I think there's still some caution."

The agency's relationship with Myriad Genetics expanded from one brand to multiple brands over the last year, including assignments for the relaunch OnDose (a colorectal cancer diagnostic test); Colaris (a genetic test for colon cancer); and the BRACAnalysis (a genetic test for risk of hereditary breast and ovarian cancer).

Other assignments included a physician outreach program for the Alzheimer's Association, and long-time client Mission Pharmacal assigned AOR status for its Lycelle Head Lice Removal Kit. Another new product was assigned from Mission this year.

Company headcount remains about 32. Tanja Noren and Betsy Kramer were promoted to the management team as VP/account directors, and Tommy Schenck joined from Abelson Taylor as account supervisor.

Topin, who is seeking mid-level digital and account service talent this year, says that finding good, experienced people hasn't been a problem.

"We're 30 years old this year, and people have seen stability and growth," he adds. "We offer an alternative to some of the larger shops in town."

Digital work continues to increase. Topin thinks

integration is important, but he disagrees with people who say digital comes first.

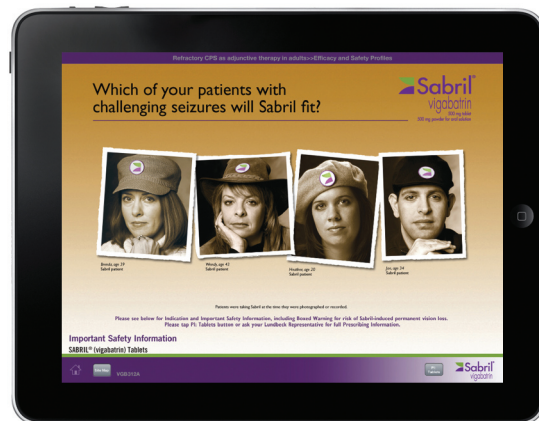
"Strategy comes first," he explains. "Digital is a channel. It's an important channel. It offers new technical and strategic opportunities, but the strategy, messaging and branding still come first."

Marginalization of agencies is an ongoing challenge. Topin notes the agency is interfacing more with middle management, which doesn't always understand the role agencies play in strategy and helping grow brands.

"The agency has to fight for the appropriate role as opposed to 'give me two ads and call me in the morning,'" he says.

Given the shifts in the industry landscape, Topin feels it's critical to be well versed in many areas.

"There [once] was a simpler world where pharma companies talked to physicians, who then talked to patients and wrote a script," he says. "Today life is more complex for all parties. Patients know more, physicians and drugs require more, and the job of the pharma manufacturer has become multilayered. It's [not] straight lines between pharma and physicians and patients. Agencies have to become more skilled and knowledgeable to help clients reach more decision-makers and extend the conversation."



Two Topin campaigns: the OnDose cancer test (above left) and seizure medication Sabril (above)

"The conversation in healthcare is continuing to rapidly change," Topin continues. "There are many more audiences to reach, and patients have become more of a catalyst—they don't salute the white coat and do what doctors say. The doctor and staff have to have a number of conversations, and the pharma company, if they want to succeed, has to help them have these conversations."

This year the agency is beginning to mine information from both patient and physician audiences to gain clarity on unmet needs that can help clients and potential clients navigate.

"There are a lot of new normals," Topin adds. "The patent cliff, regulations, new technology, lack of drugs—that's the status quo. I don't think it's going to get any simpler. It's just going to get more complex."

—Tanya Lewis