



AT THE HELM

Jim Weiss, chairman and CEO

PERFORMANCE

Last year, revenue rose 29%, hitting \$48 million

HIGHLIGHTS

Medtronic Resolute stent launch offered an opportunity for the agency to flex its multi-disciplinary muscles

Set up conflict shop Twist, primarily to handle work from Pfizer

Acquired Austin-based data firm Ravel

CHALLENGES

Making sure the agency has access to quality data and analytics

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“Our best relationships are with clients that are driving change inside their company”

—Jim Weiss

W₂O Group

Starting small, this shop found big growth via speed and flexibility

When Jim Weiss embarked on a solo consulting gig for a few small biotech and device companies, he was no doubt already plotting the best way to turn his one-man operation into a flourishing PR shop. But he couldn't possibly have imagined that, 10 years later, that shop would be the flagship of a 300-person integrated network with enough bells, whistles and expertise to offer services beyond the realm of regular PR—from creative and social media to clinical-trial recruitment and deep analytics.

W₂O Group, the newly launched parent of siblings WCG, Twist and W₂O Ventures, stands as a testament to the pulsating pace of change in healthcare and the continuing integration of marketing disciplines.

“Because everything moves faster, firms in our space have to be more nimble, more innovative, and more creative,” explains Weiss, the group's chairman and CEO. “Even the big pharmas are compacting themselves. Everyone wants to be the next Amgen or Genentech, whereas when I came into the business, everybody wanted to be the next Pfizer or Merck.”

Weiss has a client-side pedigree himself, having spent a decade or more working for biotech and device companies. Instilled with a spirit of innovation, he has always embraced change and credits it with fueling the growth of his group—a 41% compounded rate over 10 years. Last year revenues rose 29% to \$48 million. Weiss expects to close in on \$60 million in 2012.

Two springboards for this success were put in place in 2009. First, Weiss acquired design agency ODA and merged it into his WeissComm Partners shop, renaming the entity WCG. Diversifying the previously healthcare-only roster afforded opportunities in consumer and tech and broadened the firm's capabilities.

Second, Weiss hired former Dell marketing chief and social commerce guru Bob Pearson to form the backbone of the group's social media, technology and

analytics operations, which also gave W₂O a base in Austin, adding to its offices in San Francisco (HQ), New York, LA, Chicago, Washington and London.

The majority of the group's clients are biotech and devices companies, including Medtronic (Resolute stent launch), Acclarent (Cyclops launch), Spiracur and Covidien.

The Medtronic Resolute stent launch, comprising elements of PR, marketing and sales support, gave W₂O an opportunity to flex its multi-disciplinary muscles. “It was soup-to-nuts... everything they needed to launch the product,” says Weiss. “It represented all the types of work we do, and can do.”

New York-based Twist, the 50-person conflict sibling led by Jennifer Gottlieb, was set up primarily to handle Pfizer work. Galderma is another client.

Pearson, recently promoted to president, notes that 78% of new business is organic. “We don't pitch that often,” he says. “We try to match up with clients who want to innovate. Our best relationships are with clients that are driving the change inside their company.”

An example of W₂O's print work is this advertisement for Spiracur's SNaP Wound Care System

Both Weiss and Pearson believe their obsession with powerful data and deep analytics gives W₂O an edge. In April, the group acquired Ravel, an Austin-based big data firm.

“There is one industry that gets data, lives by it, and dies by it,” asserts Weiss, “and that is health.”

Pearson insists good data and analytics can make all the difference. “It's not that the models of business are bad, but that they're evolving,” he says. “When people understand the mechanics, it completely changes their approach to the market. I think we're only at the very beginning of that in health.” —James Chase