



**AT THE HELM**

Joan Bercovitz, managing director; Tim Hawkey, managing director, executive creative director

**PERFORMANCE**

Despite a few rough patches, business held steady, with no layoffs

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Wins from GlaxoSmithKline, Roche, Genentech and Biogen Idec

Added AOR assignment from BD Diagnostics and work from AbbVie

**CHALLENGES**

Relationship with Pfizer ended, and several clients failed to make the regulatory cut

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 187

**“There’s a passion for the business here that you don’t see in too many other places”**

—Joan Bercovitz

# Area 23

A new leader helps agency to do “more from the consumer end”



**A**t this time last year, Area 23 had recently installed a new managing director to lead the firm alongside managing director, executive creative director Tim Hawkey. It wasn’t the agency’s biggest news—that would’ve been the influx of A-list clients and the 50-person staff growth that necessitated a move into shiny new offices in midtown Manhattan—but it was the obvious hook for an agency profile.

And then history repeated itself. Renee Mellas, who joined Area 23 in September 2011, left the firm just 13 months into her tenure. So while nobody at the company relished the prospect of another headhunting derby, it did provide Dana Maiman, CEO and president of Area 23 parent Draftfcb Healthcare, with the opportunity to devise a dream list of qualifications. When she crossed paths with Joan Bercovitz, then SVP, managing director of client services and project management at Group DCA, she crossed items off that list one by one.

“First was client-side experience—Joan had that from her years at Astra. Second was a strong agency background—Joan had Group DCA and Saatchi,” Maiman recalls. “Third was ‘okay, some global experience would be great’—Joan worked many global accounts on both the client and agency side, so we could check that box. Last and definitely not least was digital, and based on what Joan was doing at Group

DCA she obviously knew the value of having that integrated offering. So yeah, we were thrilled to get her.” Left unsaid: the belief, inside and outside the firm, that Area 23 got it far more right this time than it did the time before.

Bercovitz formally started in her role as EVP, managing director on January 2 of this year, though she spent much of the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day meeting with Maiman and clients. “We kept calling it her soft launch. She could be catapulted,” Maiman cracks. For her part, Bercovitz was blown away by the organization and its people. “There’s a true passion for the business here that you don’t see in too many other places,” she says.

Since Bercovitz’s arrival, Area 23 has notched wins from GlaxoSmithKline, Roche, Genentech and Biogen Idec. Prior to her arrival, the firm snared work from dialysis specialists Fresenius, BD Diagnostics (an AOR assignment within the company’s women’s health portfolio) and AbbVie (the entity formerly known as Abbott, for launches of its HCV regimens in the U.S. and abroad). The headaches on the client front were familiar and all-too-common ones. Pfizer parted ways with Area 23 following an agency consolidation exercise, while products from several clients—NeurogesX, Genentech and Ziopharm Oncology—didn’t make the regulatory cut.



Area23’s range of work included pieces for Fresenius Medical Care (above left) and Lilly (above)

“It’s always disheartening. You do great work for six months, a year, even more... and then the product fails in clinical development,” Bercovitz says. “It serves as a reminder that we’re in a high-risk business.” It speaks to the skill with which Area 23 has managed its growth that none of these setbacks prompted a single layoff; the agency, in fact, invested heavily in new personnel, including consumer-marketing veteran Julia Phelan as SVP, group management director.

Phelan’s hiring should boost Area 23 as it attempts to do “more from the consumer end,” as Bercovitz puts it. Beyond that, the agency will press forward with its do-it-all vision of client service. “Gone are the days of the brands that have tens of millions of dollars to spend on agency work,” she says. “If you can’t provide that whole range of services—consumer, professional, everything—they’re going to find somebody who can.” —Larry Dobrow