



AT THE HELM

From left: Partners Ed Mitzen, Jaime Butler-Binley, Andy Pyfer, Patrick O'Shea,

PERFORMANCE

For 2012, company had \$9.5 million in revenue

HIGHLIGHTS

Picked up 17 accounts, including work from CSL Behring, Aerocrine, Auxilium and Alimera Sciences

Headcount more than doubled, going from 30 to 70

CHALLENGES

Managing growth intelligently and making sure current clients are happy

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

“We didn’t have to bolt [digital] on to a traditional model”

—Ed Mitzen

Fingerpaint

Saratoga Springs shop celebrates fifth birthday with growth spurt



For Ed Mitzen, this is a road that’s been traveled before. As a co-founder of Palio, he spent several years in survival mode before the fledgling firm flourished into a well-regarded, 125-employee-strong company. So when he says that the ideal time to check on an up-and-coming agency’s progress is around its fifth birthday, he knows what he’s talking about.

Of course, that particular yardstick flatters Fingerpaint Marketing, which just turned five. Since its founding in 2008—like Palio, in Saratoga Springs, NY—the agency had slowly built up its client base and staff. And then in 2012, everything clicked. It picked up 17 accounts, which prompted a serious growth spurt: from 30 or so full-time staffers at this time last year to 70 now. The company finished 2012 at \$9.5 million in revenue and is on pace to finish somewhere between \$12 and \$13 million when the books are closed on 2013.

“In 2012, we started to get known,” says Mitzen. “We may not be looked at for a \$5 billion launch and we’re comfortable with that. But for small-to-midsized companies who are looking for senior-level people and who want to know they’re going to be a priority, our model plays really well.”

That model is a true hybrid. On one hand, Mitzen notes that Fingerpaint employs “a lot of alpha dogs

who really like to win.” On the other, the firm eschews titles and offices, and every employee owns at least a small piece of the company. Similarly, Mitzen attributes the appeal of the Fingerpaint approach, in part, to “some dumb luck. Because we started in 2008, we were able to grow the company with digital having a seat at the table right from the beginning. We didn’t have to bolt it on to a traditional model.”

Whatever the reason, clients have clearly warmed to Fingerpaint. In the last year, the agency added two CSL Behring brands, Berinert and Zemaira, to its roster. It won Aerocrine’s Niox device for asthma management and Auxilium’s Xiaflex drug for adults with Dupuytren’s contracture. It went global with the European launch of Iluvien for Alimera Sciences (“people were coming in to the office at 3 a.m. so that there would be coverage at the start of the day in the UK,” Mitzen recalls with pride). Just as importantly, the growth was evenly distributed. Only one client—Upsher-Smith Laboratories, for which Fingerpaint is handling a pre-launch epilepsy drug—comprises more than 20% of revenues.

Given all this growth, the goal becomes managing it intelligently and making sure the attention from would-be clients doesn’t shift the focus from existing ones. “We can’t run faster than our legs can take us. We can’t get greedy and go after everything under the sun,” Mitzen says.

Some of the strain was relieved when Fingerpaint moved into new offices in May. Prior to the move, the company was cramming 70 people into a space that could really only accommodate 40. “There were people



Fingerpaint projects for Aerocrine’s Niox device (above left) and Alimera Sciences’ Iluvien* (above)

on card tables, people with no phones, you name it. It helped to build camaraderie, but towards the end it was outright uncomfortable,” Mitzen says. The new building, which was previously occupied by Borders, has 30,000 square feet of space and, following four months of renovation, can accommodate up to 110 people.

“It was like building a house: great fun but also a little maddening,” he continues. “I’d be dealing with something and then the phone would ring, and it’d be, ‘So, where do you want the Coke machine?’ I’m glad that’s done.” —Larry Dobrow

**Iluvien has not been cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for marketing in the United States.*