



**AT THE HELM**

Mark Goble, President/COO and Joe Kuchta, CEO

**PERFORMANCE**

Both revenue and staff reached all-time highs in 2012

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Won AOR assignments for products from BioMarin and Vidara Therapeutics

A big jump in West Coast business, with clients in Los Angeles, La Jolla, San Francisco and Portland, OR

**CHALLENGES**

Letting overall strategy determine the use of digital channels

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

**“We’ve adapted, but we didn’t have to change our identity to do it”**

—Joe Kuchta

# GA Communication Group

Chicago-based firm finds the right mix of sustainability and success



Growth that is steady and measured, plus a long-standing client base, are hallmarks of Chicago-headquartered GA Communication Group. The agency celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2012, and revenue and staff both hit record highs. Revenue increased from \$22 million to \$22.9 million and staff topped 100 combined in Chicago and San Diego.

“I’m happy that we hit such peaks with our business after 30 years, especially when everyone wants to only talk about tech and social media and mobile,” says CEO Joe Kuchta. “Some people ask how we can not only stay sustainable but actually be so successful. It has to do with where the value is for our clients, and that’s never going to be just platforms or media. We think and strategize with clients and create and execute great content. Of course we can execute in any media. We’ve adapted, but we didn’t have to change our identity to do it. We’re always going to be the agency that services our clients and solves their problems.”

Wins last year included AOR assignments for two rare-disease products from BioMarin (Kuvan and Naglazyme) and for Vidara Therapeutics’ Actimmune (chronic CGD).

The agency expanded its relationship with Shire to include an AOR assignment from the regenerative medicine division for the re-launch of wound care product Dermagraft.

This year work began with Invictus on an early-stage neonatal care product and with DDC Medical.

“We like working with start-ups that have really innovative products because we get to shape not just how the product comes to market but, in many cases, to help shape the company as well,” Kuchta says.

Work on pain medication Abstral was also won this year after Galena Biopharma acquired it from Prostraken (the agency had previously worked on the product). Work on ImmunoCAP was lost after ThermoFisher acquired Phadia.

Kuchta says digital work has become a necessity for every agency, noting nearly all sales aids the agency creates now include something dynamic for the iPad.

“Everyone wants to talk digital, social and mobile, but not many people really understand where it’s appropriate and where it’s not,” he says. “We’ve charged our folks to make sense of it all when it comes to our clients’ business and not get mired in a philosophical discussion. There’s no singular recipe for it.

“People are talking online more than ever because the vehicles allow it,” Kuchta continues. “Clients have to realize you can never totally control it. You can contribute, inform and engage people, and that is when it is powerful.”

The agency has more West Coast business than ever, with clients in La Jolla, Los Angeles, San Francisco and even recently, Portland, OR. The plan for the San Diego office is to serve as an extension of the Chicago office, continuing the evolution away from a digital project shop, which it was when it was acquired in 2009.



GA’s projects include work for BioMarin’s Kuvan (above left) and Upsher-Smith’s Nexa (above)

Mike McCartney joined last year from The Norton Agency as VP, account group director. Kuchta recently met with four new employees and says there are still openings. He’s expecting about 10% growth this year. —Tanya Lewis