

Harrison and Star

Sticking to what it knows best has resulted in serious business



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—Ty Curran

Hurrying to the specialty drug area—namely to oncology and rare diseases—was one way that many pharma companies faced the patent cliff. They often saw those pricey meds as a way to save their margins.

But as pharma giants compete for tiny orphan-disease patient populations—and as breast cancer, for example, starts to resemble a primary care disease state, with respect to the number of treatment options—it’s meant serious business for Omnicom’s Harrison and Star.

The last few years saw steady growth, says Ty Curran, CEO of Medical Specialist Communications Group, which comprises H&S and sister shop BioLumina. “We’ve done very, very well by focusing on specialty and on oncology,” says Curran. “That focus will continue.”

There’s been a change in who’s executing on that vision. Last year, Curran handed off the day-to-day operations of H&S to new president Mardene Miller. “I’m not looking to break anything, because it’s working fantastically,” she tells *MM&M*. “I’m looking to dial up on a couple of additional areas that can be enhanced.”

One is the strategic area, where H&S created a new offering by consolidating a few other disciplines into one department. Brian Robinson was hired in January to be EVP/head of strategy. The second way is by seeing how far the agency can push its creative, both within its own walls and through looking externally. “We want to marry our strategic offerings—we’re known for scientific acumen—and get even better with our creative,” Miller says.

While anything ending in “-ology” has been fair game, the agency’s sweet spot has become hematology/oncology. Major accounts include Novartis Oncology, where H&S handles digital and CRM sales force work, US and global, for Gleevec and the brand’s successor, Tasigna, as well as work for Novartis’ Genoptix specialized lab, which provides personalized diagnostic services to community-based hem/oncs and supports development of companion diagnostic programs.

With Gleevec slated to lose exclusivity next year in the US, H&S has been working with Novartis to help convince physicians to convert their chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) patients over to Tasigna. “It’s hard to take physicians away from something that has literally changed the face of cancer, of CML,” says Miller. While still lagging far behind Gleevec, Tasigna worldwide sales jumped last year by 39% vs. 2011, to \$998 million. So physicians seem to be coming around.

The challenge lies on the other end of the lifecycle for Copaxone, Teva’s daily MS injection. “We’ve had the product for [13 years], and every year we try to make it fresh and new,” says Miller. Again, the sales figures point in the right direction: Copaxone US sales rose last year by 13% over 2011, but it faces a host of new rivals.

The agency’s other big piece of cancer-related business involves promoting Genentech’s bio-oncology pipeline, mostly agents in Phase III. “Driving physicians to a booth at all the big oncology meetings,” is the way Miller describes the work.

The execs can’t disclose names, but the molecules that analysts and the media have been highest on include agents like the new-and-improved version of leukemia drug Rituxan, the PD-L1 immunotherapy, and antibody-drug conjugates being tested for leukemia.

Once these candidates leave the pipeline and become full-fledged brands, they’re “pitched out” to agencies. The work H&S does at the pre-launch stage gives it a shot at retaining them on its roster.

It also did work for in-market brands Avastin (multiple indications) and Zelboraf (melanoma), as well as at the franchise and pipeline levels, including for a potential novel agent for advanced basal cell carcinoma.

Non-oncology business included the launch of Incyte’s Jakafi for myelofibrosis, work for Celgene, as well as Bausch & Lomb ocular anti-inflammatory products. The agency now handles B&L’s Lotemax Gel, Bepreve, Prolensa and PreserVision. At press time it was still unclear how the \$8.7 billion sale of B&L to Valeant earlier this year would impact the agency.

These same clients, plus a few new accounts that have come in, formed the core of its new business, so



AT THE HELM

Ty Curran, CEO

PERFORMANCE

Agency had its "12th record year in billings"

HIGHLIGHTS

Helped bring about a 13% increase in sales for Teva's Copaxone

Executed the launch of Incyte's Jakafi, as well as work for Bausch + Lomb's ocular anti-inflammatory products and Celgene

Did work for Avastin and Zelboraf

Opened new offices in San Francisco and Paris

Had significant organic growth "with our existing client bases"

Agency's iPad-app development has led to healthy amount of growth

Agency is investing in augmenting its staffers' digital skills

This year, as of mid-May is "looking very, very strong"

CHALLENGES

Gleevec slated to lose exclusivity next year in the US

Headcount fell slightly, from 350 to 332

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

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Opposite page: Work for Uceris; this page: an advertisement for Bayer's Hemophilia Solutions

to speak. "We've had our 12th record year in billings," boasts Curran. "The majority of that is due to our organic growth with our existing client bases."

This year, as of mid-May, is "looking very, very strong," he says. New work that comes in is split between H&S and BioLumina, which can handle conflicts. The latter has also been under new management since last year, after Ane Jones was promoted

The trick is to deliver an "educationally interactive" experience that engages docs. "We understand the oncologist probably better than other agencies out there and take that understanding...and translate it into some very innovative [iPad work]," he says.

H&S is also increasing its investment in building staffers' digital chops. The crown jewel of its push is a program with internal and external pieces. In addition to live seminars, much of the in-house portion occurs online. "At any given time, if you're waiting for a job, you can log in and do a training for an hour...It's at everyone's fingertips," says Miller.

These competencies are tied into every employee's performance metrics, something new this year. No one is immune. "We just want to show everyone how serious we take

this and how we want everyone to be at the top of their game digitally," says Miller. "We're competing with digital shops that can take away our business."

Headcount fell slightly to 332 last year, from 350, which the execs attribute to natural attrition. Especially as almost every other shop gravitates toward the same area, the chief challenge in trying to stay the premier specialist agency is talent, says Curran. "It's tough, and will continue to be, to get those people who understand oncology, specialist markets and physicians," he says. "It takes a certain breed." — Marc Iskowitz



Harrison and Star's work covers a broad range of drugs, programs and devices

to president. Other signs of growth for H&S include the opening of an office in San Francisco and one in Paris, run by global managing director Kirsten Hanson.

A big factor behind the growth, says Curran, has been the agency's iPad-app development. "We're continuing to expand our iPad work," he says, including sales force and other apps. "As it gets harder for sales reps to see physicians, sales access is probably becoming the number-one concern for pharma," says Curran.

