



AT THE HELM

Jim Weiss, chairman and CEO

PERFORMANCE

Revenue rose 30% last year to more than \$62 million

HIGHLIGHTS

Creating W₂O Digital, leading to the production of innovative digital properties for such clients as Genomic Health and PhRMA

About 160 employees joined the firm, increasing headcount to nearly 400

CHALLENGES

Finding ways to further strengthen analytic and digital capabilities

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

“We keep growing because we’re not just selling widgets”

—Jim Weiss

W2O Group

Using acquisitions and hires as the building blocks for steady growth

W2O Group’s back story, in a nutshell: Jim Weiss evolves his healthcare-focused PR agency WeissComm Partners into W2O Group through acquisition of small but well established specialty shops and a diverse staff of A-list senior talent. Headquartered in San Francisco, W2O Group was officially formed in March 2012. It serves as parent to a network of siblings—WCG, Twist, W2O Digital, BrewLife and W2O Ventures—with offices in New York, Austin, Los Angeles and London.

Revenue climbed about 30% last year to more than \$62 million. Healthcare business represented 85% of 2012 net fee income. “We expect to get to about \$80 million in revenue in 2013 because of our increased offerings, including data-driven digital,” says Weiss, CEO and chairman of W2O Group. “Combining our traditional strength in analytics with digital we can offer smarter, stronger engagement platforms.”

WeissComm was renamed WCG in 2009 after the acquisition of creative agency ODA, and W2O president Bob Pearson’s former social media consultancy. BrewLife, formed early this year, serves entrepreneurial start-up clients like Invitae (genetic testing) and Sandbox Industries’ incubator Healthbox.

Perhaps the biggest highlight of 2012 was the creation of W2O Digital. The 85-person group was bolstered through acquisition of two Austin-based companies—digital agency VM Foundry and big-data firm Ravel. Dave Mihalovic and Jamie Peck, both of whom came to W2O from Rosetta after the Publicis buyout, and VM Foundry owner Jim Eustace, lead W2O Digital.

Examples of data-driven digital work include identification of top influencers in numerous categories for Sharecare and development of innovative digital

properties for Genomic Health, Pfizer Integrated Health, Covidien, Qualcomm Life, and PhRMA. A project called MDigital Life launched last year to shed light on how physicians are using social media to get and communicate health information.

About 160 employees have joined since early 2012, bringing the total to nearly 400. “We keep growing because we’re not just selling widgets,” he says. “We create interesting data-driven communications platforms.”

Weiss plans to continue to strengthen analytics and digital capability through small acquisitions and hires in markets like Boston and Washington, DC, and perhaps in Europe. London-based Mettle Consulting, an analytics-driven reputation consultancy, and Partners for Medical Education, a direct-to-patient advocacy and healthcare education firm, were acquired this year.

“We’ll probably get something done soon in Washington, DC,” he says. “I want to apply microtargeting concepts used in elections to better understand who to target with what message at what time. We’ll continue combining tech and innovation with good old-fashioned ideas—‘communications engineering’ is what we like to call it.” —Tanya Lewis



The website for Apnicure’s Winx Sleep Therapy System shows off W2O’s digital capabilities