



**AT THE HELM**

Steve Michaelson,  
CEO

**PERFORMANCE**

For 2013, revenue was up about 15% over 2013

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Combined agency emerged with a strong and diverse roster, with such clients as Abbott Point of Care, Avanir, Genentech and Lundbeck

New business from Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals, bioCSL, BTG International and others

**CHALLENGES**

Tighter budgets and holding company consolidation

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 183

**“We know how to give clients big agency experience in a less bureaucratic manner”**

—Steve Michaelson

# Calcium

Merger of independent agencies makes for the best of both worlds



**C**alcium NYC, the startup founded by Steven Michaelson and his former partners at Wishbone, along with Philadelphia shop Vox Medica, was acquired early this year by the independent network Star Group. (Wishbone was acquired by Rosetta in 2009 and then wholly absorbed into Rosetta in 2011 after the Publicis acquisition.)

Star Group then merged Vox and Calcium NYC with Star Life Science. Combined, the three agencies are now known as Calcium, with Michaelson as CEO.

Vox’s Lorna Weir is president and chief strategic officer. Timmy Garde, who came from Star Group and worked at Vox, is COO. Former Wishbone founding partners Steve Hamburg and Judy Capano are leading creative and new business development, respectively.

The newly formed entity was Garde’s brainchild, and Michaelson couldn’t be happier with how things have come together. “I started Calcium at the end of 2012 to get the band from Wishbone back together,” Michaelson says. “We had less than 10 employees and had been partnering with Star Group. We had known Timmy for a long time—Star Group wanted to buy Wishbone three years before Rosetta. Timmy’s concept

was to combine Vox’s very strong science and medical expertise and Calcium’s strategic and creative strength with Star Life Science’s digital expertise to create one agency with unparalleled services.”

Michaelson adds that “we were all independent agencies, so we know how to give clients big agency experience in a less bureaucratic manner. We’re nimble and we don’t have the restraints of a big holding company.”

The combined roster is strong and diverse, including clients such as Abbott Point of Care, Avanir, Genentech, Lundbeck, Teva Pharmaceuticals and Onconova Therapeutics. Michaelson says revenue was up about 15% over 2012, mostly coming from Vox and Star Life Science. New wins this year have come in from Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals, bioCSL, BTG International, Core Risks, Merz North America and Spectrum Pharmaceuticals.

“Clients are excited about the agency,” Michaelson says. “They all knew about the merger before it happened. I haven’t heard any clients say, ‘Oh no, this isn’t going to work out because we want you smaller with fewer capabilities.’”

This May, Calcium opened a San Francisco office with Garth McCallum-Keeler, formerly of AgencyRx, serving as managing partner in California. The office has already landed project work for a specialty pharma client, and McCallum-Keeler will continue to build out business and hire staff this year.

Plans are also in the works for a Boston office. One account person is already on the ground there.

The agency has about 65 employees. Some people left before and during the merger, but no one was let go.

Michaelson notes the ongoing need to do more on tighter budgets and holding company consolidation.



**From left: Calcium executed work for Merz North America’s Cuvposa and Onconova Therapeutics**

“When big pharma companies consolidate business with a holding company, they’re cutting out the competition,” he says. “They’re just hurting themselves because the product and creative suffer. I think there will be a shift out of that. Wishbone got a lot of business from big clients that were tired of being forced to work with someone.”

Rebranding of all offices is underway, and a self-promotion campaign launched in April.

“There’s a lot of excitement around the agency,” Michaelson says. “As long as we continue to do great work, everything else will take care of itself.”

—Tanya Lewis