



#### AT THE HELM

Steve Piotrowski, EVP,  
managing director

#### PERFORMANCE

Agency reached the  
\$7 million range over  
the past year

#### HIGHLIGHTS

Brought on seven  
brands in Genzyme's  
rare-disease franchise

Won work for a  
colonoscopy prep  
product from Braintree  
Laboratories

Headcount has gone  
from five to 22 since  
the agency opened  
its doors in early 2013

#### CHALLENGES

Countering client per-  
ceptions of the cost of  
a network agency

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

**"We can tap  
2,000 smart  
marketers on  
a moment's  
notice"**

—Steve Piotrowski

# H4B Back Bay

Network shop's nimble approach  
makes waves in the Boston market



**H**ealthcare and pharma marketing agencies aren't exactly unknown quantities in the Boston market. Biotech companies, in particular, have dotted the Route 128 landscape for years. But the limited size of those companies—and, yes, their willingness to spend—has kept network firms from establishing much beyond desk-sized outposts in the region.

That's why the business is watching the quick growth of Havas-owned H4B Back Bay with such interest. It isn't like Havas just rolled into town with 200 employees in tow; H4B Back Bay may have more than quadrupled in headcount since opening its doors in early 2013, but that quadrupling only reflects an increase from five to 22. What has everyone so interested is the particular challenge H4B Back Bay is confronting head-on: remaining as small and responsive as the potential client base demands while continuing to meet corporate profit mandates.

"We're a network agency. We have those metrics to live by," acknowledges EVP, managing director Steve Piotrowski. "But what we're trying to do is reenvision the network agency as a boutique, as nimble and scalable."

The type of startups and specialty companies H4B Back Bay is targeting shy away from network firms

because they charge more than their indie brethren. Still, it's hard to imagine that such entities wouldn't want to avail themselves of the benefits of a network-owned agency, particularly when it comes to global reach and intellectual depth. "We can tap 2,000 smart marketers on a moment's notice," Piotrowski notes.

The goal for H4B Back Bay, then, is to toe that line: Stay small enough so that Piotrowski and EVP, creative director Julien Jarreau can continue to counsel clients on a day-to-day basis, yet succeed to the extent that it justifies the investment of its parent entity.

"It's terrifying and it's thrilling at the same time," Jarreau admits. "The terrifying part is the volatility of a smaller company. The thrilling part is being up here in this great market with new creative ideas and new tools."

So far, so good. H4B Back Bay zipped into the \$7 million revenue range over the last year thanks to two very different types of client additions—seven brands in Genzyme's rare-disease franchise and a colonoscopy prep product from Braintree Laboratories. Those wins were enough to help the firm offset the loss of EMD Serono, which consolidated its work with a single agency.

"The clients up here are thirsty for something different," Piotrowski says. "In the New York/New Jersey pharma belt, they've become skeptical of the marketing tools and platforms—'Oh, that's just another way to say you have a positioning thing.' Here, they're received really well." Neither Piotrowski nor Jarreau think it's a coincidence that two Boston-area competitors recently announced the assembly of strategic planning teams.



**H4B Back Bay did digital work for Apilgraf (left)  
and promotional pieces for Septrafilm (above)**

Expect H4B Back Bay to spend the months ahead continuing to address perceptions of network firms, especially in conversations with smaller clients that lack wads of marketing cash to fling around. "It's going to take a while for the market up here to realize that a network agency doesn't necessarily mean, 'We charge big bucks,'" Jarreau says. But even if the company erases all such concerns, don't expect complacency to set in.

"We're no longer a startup, but I don't think we're going to lose that [mentality] until we're at \$10-\$15 million [in revenue]," Jarreau adds. "Are there enough large clients in this neck of the woods so that we can sustain this level of growth over the next few years? We're not going to sit back and declare we have it all figured out." —Larry Dobrow