

100 AGENCIES



AT THE HELM

Renee Mellas, managing director, accounts, and Tim Hawkey, managing director, creative

PERFORMANCE

Grew 25% year over year

HIGHLIGHTS

Won 11 new AOR assignments and had a 70% pitch win rate

Work for a GlaxoSmithKline and Janssen investigational rheumatoid arthritis antibody, sirukumab

CHALLENGES

Keeping up with its own growth

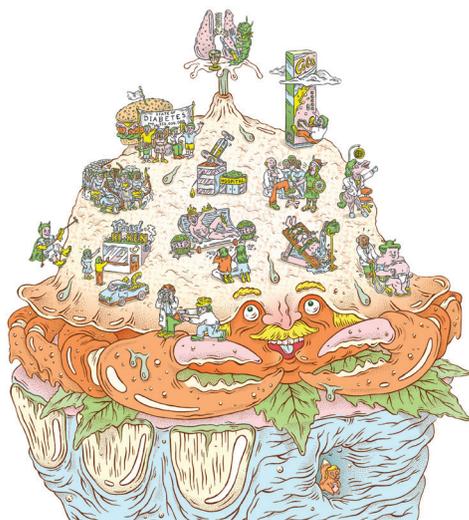
For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A to Z, beginning on page 183

“IT’S ABOUT MAINTAINING THE FEELING AND THE CULTURE THAT BROUGHT PEOPLE TO THE AGENCY IN THE FIRST PLACE.”

—TIM HAWKEY

AREA 23

Innovation derives from internal growth for this well-groomed agency



Innovation can be an elusive concept for pharma and, by extension, for its agencies. Drugmakers demand innovative solutions but in the same breath ask for solutions that are tried, tested and boast a competitive ROI, entirely failing to understand what it means to innovate.

That quandary plagued Area 23’s managing director, creative Tim Hawkey, too: How can a healthcare agency innovate when every hour needs to be tied to a client, especially when resources are thin?

“We noticed there wasn’t really room for innovation in a healthcare agency—in the way they’re currently built,” Hawkey says. “We’re trying to deliver on billable hours and keep everyone utilized.”

The answer, he found, was simple enough: Make time for it. “We carved out a percentage of everyone’s time and told them: ‘Take some self-directed time, come up with a big idea and present in front of the agency.’”

A year and 125 “really interesting” ideas later, and Area 23 may be on to something. Hawkey says the initiative, “What If,” not only helped employees think creatively about problem solving, but also prompted the company to help get clients thinking outside the box, too.

“One team came forward in the middle of the year,” he says. “They worked with a melanoma client and wanted to take on the tanning bed industry and emphasize the link between tanning beds and melanoma. We decided to open our own tanning salon, offering people on the street their own ‘free killer tan.’ When they got into the salon we created, they got their free tan coupons and the shock of a lifetime: We created a huge funeral parlor in the backroom, replete with a tanning bed casket and a picture of the person. Within days the video had over a million views and 12 million impressions in a month—all on a \$3,000 budget.”

For Hawkey, “Free Killer Tans” represents the value of the big idea and how breakthrough ideas can not only spread rapidly but also nearly eliminate the cost per viewer. “It’s helping us open new doors with clients,” he notes.

That approach seems to be a successful one so far, as he dubs 2014 “without any exaggeration, the best year in our agency’s history.”

The Interpublic-owned agency grew 25% year over year, brought in 61 new employees (running its head count to 200), won 11 new AOR assignments and had a 70% pitch win rate, Hawkey reports.

A highlight for the agency was a pitch for a GlaxoSmithKline and Janssen investigational rheumatoid arthritis antibody, sirukumab. “That was a holding company-level pitch, very competitive, and it was for everything: US, global, professional and consumer businesses. That was the type of pitch where you have to put everything out on the table, Hawkey says.”



Above left: The Wonderful World of What If, Area 23’s in-house think tank experiment. Above: The State of Diabetes

So what’s left after your agency just had its “best year ever”? Hawkey says it will be to preserve culture while the agency continues to grow. “You can only grow so fast and do it well, so keeping up with our own growth is one of our biggest challenges,” he explains. “You can’t triple in size without aspects of the culture changing. Being able to retain the loyalists—the people who were there from the beginning—is very important to us. It’s about maintaining the feeling and the culture that brought people to the agency in the first place.”

—Kevin McCaffrey