

**100
AGENCIES**



AT THE HELM

Marcia McLaughlin, president and CEO

PERFORMANCE

Revenue of \$25 million in 2014, up nearly 20%

HIGHLIGHTS

Relocated to a larger space in NYC

Staffed up to 105 (from 78)

Relaunched Forest Pharmaceuticals's Saphris

CHALLENGES

Talent acquisition, as well as shrinking pharma budgets

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

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—MARCIA McLAUGHLIN

CENTRON

Launching from a “scientific platform” has worked wonders for this agency



Centron president and CEO Marci McLaughlin freely admits that last year’s move into new offices on Broadway in New York City left her feeling more than a bit of trepidation. “I was a little nervous about all the space. It was like, ‘Oh my goodness, what are we going to do with all this space?’”

Her fears proved unfounded. Centron grew its revenue by 20% in 2014, placing it at around \$25 million for the year, and upped head count from 78 to 105. There were several factors that spurred the growth, but the 13 account wins (against zero losses) probably had something to do with it. Additionally, Centron’s footprint in the specialty health-care space put it in the center of a category that’s become a focal point of pharmaceutical pipelines.

Centron’s 2014 slate included high-profile work on Gilead Sciences’ transformative hep.-C medications Sovaldi and Harvoni and a handful of launches, including Ipsen’s cancer treatment Somatuline and a pediatric indication for Eisai’s chemotherapy-nausea medication Aloxi. Centron won assignments from Novartis and work on the relaunch of Forest Pharmaceuticals’ bipolar disorder/schizophrenia drug Saphris. The latter was a double win of sorts: not only did Centron win the business, but the agency kept it after Actavis scooped up Forest as part of its 2014 M&A binge.

The Centron brand itself grew a bit in mid-2015,

when parent company HealthStar Communications moved HealthStar PR and HealthStar Market Access under the Centron roof; the former is now known as Centron PR and the latter as Centron Market Access. McLaughlin believes that housing multiple services under a single brand name conveys to clients that a company is able to assemble an alliance of teams that work well together. This, in turn, helps an agency “become a much more valued partner to the client. It winds up growing your business.” HealthStar Communications also divested itself of LehmanMillet, which will continue to operate as an independent agency.

The expanded Centron brand also reflects the AOR-type assignments—as opposed to PR or med-ed work on a project basis—that have recently come the agency’s way. McLaughlin attributes the change in part to Centron’s policy of staffing teams with senior-level talent. “Clients were consistently saying their biggest issue [with other agencies] is that they come and pitch with the senior people on the team and then they put the children on the business,” she quips.

Centron’s refined strategic approach also plays a role. The agency generally starts with the science of a given product, then factors in market dynamics to create what McLaughlin calls a “scientific platform.” This becomes the foundation for the story that is told in every piece of client work. The system, she notes, helps the agency tackle short project timelines without sacrificing quality—a huge advantage now that client budgets and product launch windows alike have narrowed.



Centron messaged with dolphins for antiemetic Akynzeo (above left) and harnessed a new icon for Somatuline (above)

On the personnel front, Centron’s workforce mixes millennials with individuals who, in some cases, boast decades of healthcare marketing experience. McLaughlin says the varying levels of experience among employees encourage an openness to cutting-edge ideas and tactics, even as certain staffers may find themselves slightly intimidated by the newness of certain approaches.

“New isn’t bad. New is good,” McLaughlin says. “If we are engaging patients, then that’s a good thing.”

—Deborah Weinstein