

100  
AGENCIES



**AT THE HELM**  
Natalie McDonald,  
president and founder

**PERFORMANCE**  
Passed \$10 million in  
revenue in 2014

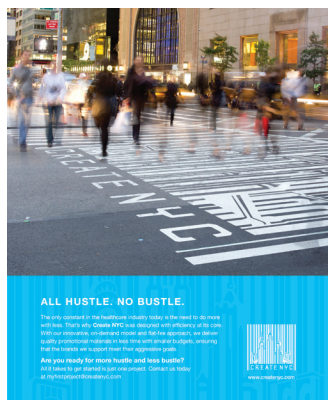
**HIGHLIGHTS**  
Added Novartis,  
Otsuka, Allergan and  
Boehringer Ingelheim  
to its roster

**CHALLENGES**  
Diversification of its  
client base

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

## CREATE NYC

Collaboration is the name of the game  
at this six-year-old shop



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—NATALIE McDONALD

It’s the rare agency executive who doesn’t rhapsodize about his or her company’s super-unique “model.” But for all the talk about structural malleability and administrative efficiency, most agency models boil down to this: Our model is whatever the client wants it to be.

That’s not the case with Create NYC, a nearly six-year-old shop that passed the \$10-million mark in revenue for the first time in 2014. Create isn’t much interested in pre-launch brands. It’s totally cool with no-contract flat-fee arrangements. And while it likely wouldn’t turn down a big honkin’ AOR assignment, the firm is far more keen to work alongside other agencies. That’s right, clients: The people at Create NYC don’t mind if they’re not your one and only. They prefer it that way, actually.

“We are a complement agency option,” Natalie McDonald, Create’s president and founding creator (get it?), says flatly.

Create isn’t the only agency that puts flexibility over permanence. The company counts 20 full-time staffers and has another 180 copywriters, programmers, art directors and the like on speed-dial. But Create might be the only one that touts the way it goes about its business as a defining reason that clients should do business with them.

According to McDonald, the Create model fits

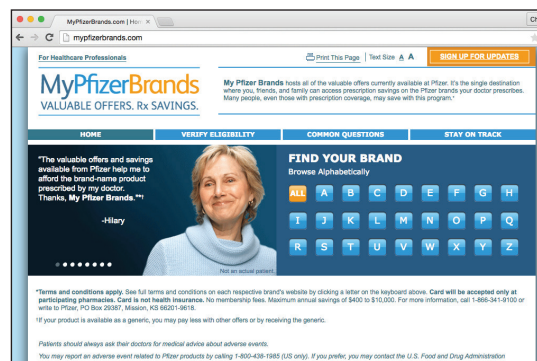
comfortably between the traditional AOR arrangement and the “in-house-managed, off-shore-style support” approach favored by other companies. “There’s never really been a middle ground,” she explains. “What we try to do is serve as an extension of the existing team and provide a white-glove touch where it’s needed.”

Clients—and other agencies—have responded in kind. Over the past year Create added a quartet of heavy hitters (Novartis, Otsuka, Allergan and Boehringer Ingelheim) to its roster; McDonald says the firm supported around 35 brands in total. The company has also grown out its relationship with Pfizer, from a single brand in 2010 to “25, in some way, shape or form,” currently.

As for working alongside other agencies, McDonald characterizes those relationships as largely free of territoriality. “We set our expectations and roles and responsibilities from the get-go, because that’s the only way these things can work as a collaboration,” she says. “We understand what our scope is. It’s never, ‘I’ll take that and you take this’ halfway through a project.”

Create’s insistence on being “super-particular” about staffing each client’s business is likely what prevents the company from biting off more than it can chew, especially not-yet-launched brands. “Not that our team and creator hub isn’t capable, but it requires a different mind-set,” McDonald says. And the budget/resource efficiencies that Create tries to build into every one of its assignments tend to make pre-launch projects a no-go.

“We’d be spending hours debating strategy and refining the messaging. That’s why late-life market-



A team player: Create NYC’s house ad (above left) and My Pfizer Brands (above), an online inlet to 42 Pfizer brands

ing, trying to retain as much value as possible in the one or two years leading up to patent loss, is a better fit for us. It’s a very different set of marketing levers you pull. We have it down to a formula, in essence,” McDonald adds.

Up next on Create’s agenda? Further diversification of the company’s client base, but not at the expense of tweaking its model. “Ten million dollars [in revenue] was a big milestone, for sure,” McDonald says. “But so will be \$15 million, \$20 million and beyond.”

—Larry Dobrow