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AGENCIES



AT THE HELM
Joe Kuchta, CEO

PERFORMANCE
Revenue grew to \$23.1 million

HIGHLIGHTS
Became AOR for Imbruvica

Won AOR work from two existing clients

Relocated San Diego office to Los Angeles

CHALLENGES
Hiring high-caliber people

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

GA COMMUNICATION GROUP

Fast and steady wins the race



“IT WAS A WATERSHED MOMENT TO WIN THREE OUT OF THREE SIGNIFICANT ASSIGNMENTS.”

—JOE KUCHTA

“Even-keeled” is probably the most succinct description of Chicago-headquartered GA Communication Group. Organic growth with long-standing clients and a steady double-digit growth trajectory are both characteristic of the agency. And while both held true last year, the agency also steadily continued to evolve.

Three new agencies joined Sandbox, the independent network that GA CEO Joe Kuchta and COO Mark Goble helped form in 2013. GA is the network’s only pure healthcare agency, and its affiliation with varied agencies is contributing to GA’s evolution.

“Sandbox really started to take shape last year,” Kuchta explains. “It’s adding a whole new dimension to GA and gives us additional resources to help with all of our growth. As we incorporate [the network resources] more into the capability story we tell, it gets clients’ attention and adds cachet.”

Underline Communications, a New York City-based CRM agency that works with blue-chip consumer brands, joined Sandbox last year. Tapping Underline’s expertise is helping GA drive outstanding results for its clients, Kuchta says.

Revenue last year was up to \$23.1 million and new business wins were a definite highlight. The agency began a relationship with Pharmacylics, which awarded corporate work and HCP AOR for oncology product Imbruvica (co-promoted with Johnson & Johnson). The relationship expanded this year to include patient AOR on Imbruvica.

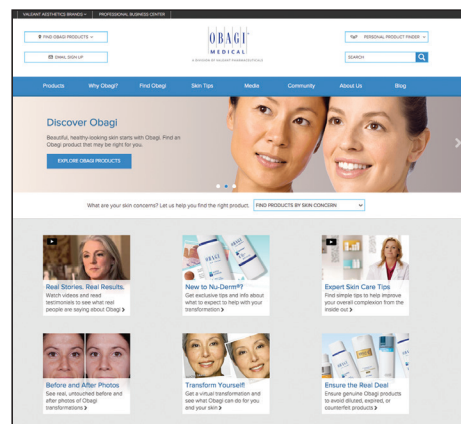
GA also won two big AOR assignments from existing clients Upsher-Smith and BioMarin, the former for a pipeline epilepsy drug, the latter for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

“I’m proud of our new assignments,” Kuchta says. “All were won in competitive pitches. We’re the type of agency that doesn’t have to pitch much. We don’t have the roller coaster of losing a lot of business. It was a watershed moment to win three out of three significant assignments.”

Between 30% and 40% of GA’s business is now with West Coast-based clients. The San Diego office relocated to Los Angeles last year, which is close to Long Beach client Obagi and nearer to NorCal clients, including BioMarin and Pharmacylics.

Head count was up about five, to 105, at the end of 2014 and hit 120 by mid-2015. Finding the right talent was last year’s biggest challenge, but the agency is drawing new employees from all over the country.

“It’s competitive out there,” Kuchta says. “There aren’t a lot of people on the street now. We’ve made a commitment to never just fill seats with butts. We’ve been slow and deliberate about finding the caliber of people we want, and that has been a challenge. I’d rather have those kinds of issues than



Above left: GA launched GelShield, designed for NICU patients. Above: GA’s website for Obagi Medical Products

not having enough business.”

Kuchta is expecting 2015 to be an explosive growth year. Yet as always, he’s focused on making sure existing clients are happy.

“We have a current base of more than \$20 million in business that needs just as much energy, excitement and attention as our new wins,” he notes. “We want to make sure that blends seamlessly.”

—Tanya Lewis