

100
AGENCIES

GSW

Being the voice of the patient drives the creative teams at this Ohio agency



“OPHTHALMOLOGISTS REACT TO CREATIVITY THE SAME WAY WE REACT TO CREATIVITY. THEY LIKE STORYTELLING.”

—DAVE SONDERMAN

Talking yourself out of an assignment is not generally how agencies stay in business—and that holds double for firms with 530 employees and a legacy that spans decades.

Then again, in Ventiv Health-owned GSW tends to do the unexpected. In this instance, the agency told client Eli Lilly that the best thing it could do for its US insulins portfolio would be to assign the work to a single agency. If Lilly took GSW up on the idea, it could've made the relationship disappear, but EVP and COO Dan Smith says that there was no internal debate: The recommendation was in the client's best interest. So GSW shared its recommendation and Lilly followed suit ... by consolidating its insulins portfolio with GSW, which added the consumer side of the business to the professional work it already held.

That's just one example of how GSW goes about its business in a manner different than its agency competition. Another might be seen in its approach to promoting a Tear Lab diagnostic test for the dry-eye syndrome hyperosmolarity. It'd be easy to use

contrasting images of eyes, but GSW opted instead to address the target audience of ophthalmologists as people, not professionals.

“Ophthalmologists react to creativity the same way we react to creativity. They like storytelling,” EVP and creative director Dave Sonderman explains. Along those lines, GSW created the cravat-wearing, baton-toting Mr. Hyperosmolarity (@Mr_HyperO on Twitter), described by Sonderman as a “mysterious and charming villain character used as a metaphor for the diagnostic and the condition.”

First-person stories work, Sonderman says, and the GSW team believes such a tactic is often the most effective way to address an audience. However, don't discount the firm's ability to convey messages with a lightness and wit lacking in much pharma and healthcare marketing—like the approach GSW took on behalf of AstraZeneca's COPD medication Tudorza, which illustrated patient frustration about having to stay close to home by having an armchair do the talking.

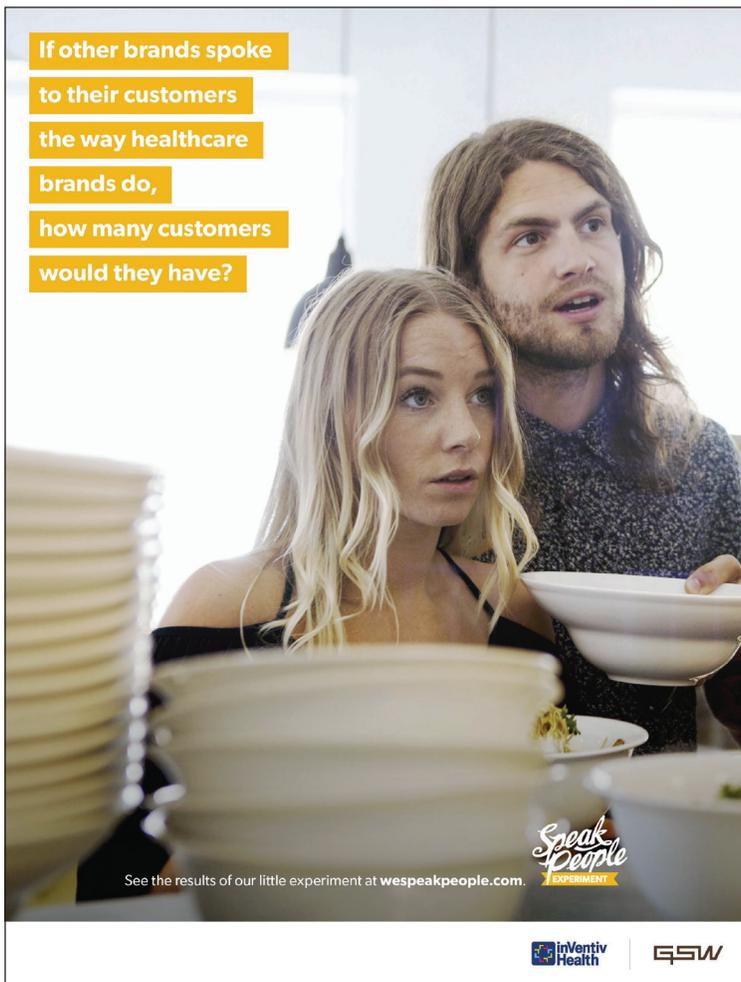
Similarly, GSW isn't afraid of provocation when the occasion calls for it. For Mental Health America of Franklin County, the agency devised a campaign around parking signs that read “Reserved for Wack Job.” The thinking was to convey perceptions about mental illness that prevent patients from seeking treatment. The project started off as a local effort but was considered so effective that 45 additional chapters adopted it.

Marci Piasecki, who joined the agency in January 2014 as president of the New York office from McCann Health and was named president of North America in August, says the company's “Speak People” mantra works as a springboard for excellent creative and messaging. “On any given day you can find yourself as a patient and you are the voice of the patient,” she explains, adding that this perspective now has added heft because of how significantly the healthcare space has changed for their clients.

“At one time clinicians drove the conversation and there might have been some who argued the healthcare professional was king,” she continues. “But they are not only listening to patients now. They are relying on information that makes them more like people.” An approach like the one used for Tear Lab, then, makes sense from a patient perspective as well. “Ophthalmologists spend their career talking to people and speaking to people,” Piasecki says, noting that the language that speaks to professionals as more than clinicians also helps them in their everyday conversations.

On the new-business front, GSW landed eight new clients and 24 new accounts in 2014. The list includes Stryker's GetAroundKnee and Makoplasty, Allergan's (née Actavis's) major depressive disorder drug Fetzima (as DTC agency of record), Novo Nordisk's global hemophilia portfolio, Cyberonics' VNS Therapy, Eli Lilly's experimental cancer medication necitumumab and Amgen's osteoporosis drug Prolia (AOR and digital). The

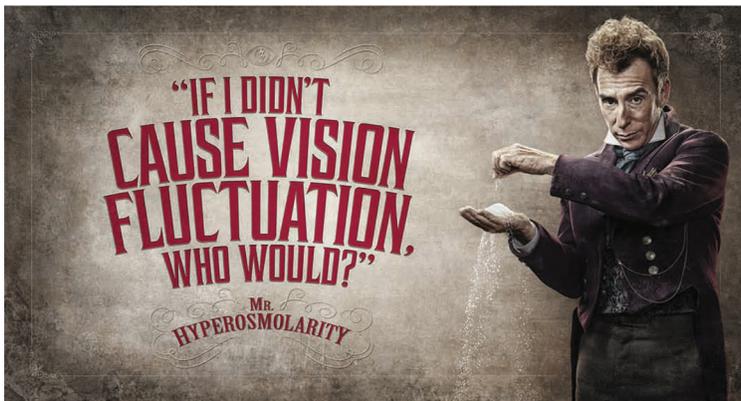
If other brands spoke
to their customers
the way healthcare
brands do,
how many customers
would they have?



See the results of our little experiment at wespeakpeople.com.



Opposite page: GSW targeted dermatologists about a new MOA for treating psoriasis in its Amgen campaign "The Storm." Above: "Speak People" points readers to online inVentiv Health content. Below: An HCP for Tear Lab's diagnostic test



firm also expanded its professional account work for UCB (for which it launched a new epilepsy medication) and landed the launch work for a follow-on medication. Consumer and digital media make up about 45% of the agency's work, while social—a big component of the Tear Lab assignment—flows through the professional pieces as well.

The flow of new work helped GSW, which generates around \$100 million in annual revenues, rebound from a smattering of account losses at

the end of 2014, which were triggered by the wave of agency consolidations. "We won't be the only agency telling this story," Piasecki notes.

Fallout from the lost business did not mean the agency receded, of course. Revenue grew between 2.5% and 3.5% in 2014 versus the year-ago period—which was a robust one itself, with 21 new assignments. However, the consolidation trend meant that GSW's growth in 2014 was comparatively small, especially when pitted against recent years. Piasecki notes that the growth rate belies the speed with which GSW brought on new work both from new and existing clients within a 10-month period. "To say we were determined is an understatement," she says.

The smaller revenue increase did not translate into a smaller staff. Head count remained relatively flat at the aforementioned 530 staffers, with a handful of employees shifting into new roles. GSW also did its share of reorganizing and hiring, an effort which included elevating Kevin Coleman to EVP of growth strategy and Matthew Mizer to EVP of new business and marketing; the two were previously EVP/general manager at the Columbus office. The new roles mean they will work tag-team-style: Coleman will seek out new prospects, while Mizer will lead the pitch responses. GSW also imported former FCB Health exec Melissa Morrow to serve as SVP and managing director of the Philadelphia-area office.

The GSW culture, executive director Susan Perlbachs says, is one of problem solvers. The terms "puzzle" and "fun"

come up frequently among agency leadership and are part of an ethic that shapes how the company approaches internal and external matters. "We want to get great ideas out the door and we don't like the word no. We're all about yes," Perlbachs says.

Piasecki adds that the GSW approach works because "everybody has a voice. No one is afraid to speak up and no one is afraid to offer an idea. And that's huge."

—Deborah Weinstein



AT THE HELM

Marci Piasecki, president

PERFORMANCE

Annual revenues of around \$100 million, up 2.5% to 3.5% over the previous year's

HIGHLIGHTS

Hired Marci Piasecki as president of GSW's New York office and promoted her to president, North America in August

Hired Melissa Morrow as SVP and managing director, Philadelphia-area office

Promoted Kevin Coleman to EVP, growth strategy, and Matthew Mizer to EVP, new business and marketing

Landed eight new clients and 24 new accounts in 2014

CHALLENGES

A smattering of account losses at the end of 2014

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