

KLICK HEALTH

Ice cream? Salons? Klick does it all, and does it well



“WE’VE BEEN WORKING TO MAKE SURE THERE IS A MASSIVE VALUE-ADD IN EVERY INTERACTION WITH KLICK. THAT’S THE NEW STANDARD WE’RE HOLDING OURSELVES TO.”

—LEEROM SEGAL

When agency-profile assignments are dished out at the MM&M offices in late April, they’re generally accepted without cheer or dismay. You get who you get, you do your research, you do the interviews and you call it an afternoon—unless, that is, you have the good fortune to be assigned Klick Health as one of your profilees, in which case you give yourself a silent high five, knowing that at least one of your calls will feel less like a chore and more like a glimpse under the hood of a really cool car.

Even so, you can’t help but be taken a little aback when Leerom Segal, Klick’s co-founder and CEO, kicks off his discussion of the agency’s recent fortunes by talking about ... the power and allure of ice cream? Yes, the power and allure of ice cream. As part of the “Getting a Taste of Klick” recruiting push, through which it hoped to locate and hire around 150 people, the company sent a Klick-branded ice-cream cart deep into the heart of enemy territory. While Segal won’t venture a numerical guess as to the volume of ice cream the

agency’s street teams dished out, he offers that it was “a lot.”

Klick pursued the employee-acquisition battle on other fronts as well, like elevator screens in buildings populated by the competition. It also coordinated a pair of events, one at Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada and another at the Air Canada Centre, which allowed prospective employees to gaze into the crystal ball of a possible future with Klick. The agency didn’t claim that its competitors wouldn’t be able to coordinate a few laps around the rink with hockey dignitaries like Wendell Clark, but, well, that was sort of implied.

Did it work? Of course it worked. Segal reports a 220% growth in applications and that activity on Klick’s LinkedIn page was “cranked up.” It’s not as if the company put the plan into motion and then stepped away—“we needed to train more than 40 of our people to be rapid-interviewing ambassadors, so we could get a sense of somebody’s culture fit really quickly,” he notes—but the approach felt entirely appropriate for Klick. To frame it another way: How many healthcare marketing holding companies would attack the problem in a similar manner?

Segal dismisses this and other recent successes with characteristic self-deprecation: “We’ve been consistently lucky for the last 18 years.” At the same time, Klick took things to the proverbial next level in 2014, growing head count from 350 to 448 (that’s before “Getting a Taste” started to work its tasty magic). It pushed revenue past the \$100-million milestone, to an estimated \$115 million, up 30% over 2013. (Klick won’t confirm or dispute the figure; per a Klick spokesperson, “As a private organization, we don’t disclose our financials beyond saying over \$100 million/year [in revenue].”)

With that kind of growth—insert “explosive,” “volcanic” or other appropriately hyperbolic adjective here—comes the inevitable concern about continually replenishing the talent font. Admittedly, this is the kind of problem most agencies would kill to have, not unlike a logjam at the front desk prompted by hordes of would-be clients trying to get an audience with agency brass. But in dealing with the issue the way it did, Klick showed the ingenuity—and the competitiveness—that characterizes almost everything the agency does.

“To secure our future [talent] pipeline, I think we needed to make our recruiting more experiential,” Segal says. “The numbers get a little crazy. You can’t do what we were trying to do with traditional approaches to recruiting.”

It is here we pause to note that we’re approximately 570 words into a profile of Klick and we haven’t yet gotten around to discussing the agency’s work. And perhaps that is Klick’s particular genius: That it generates so much excitement around itself that clients are drawn in even before they get an earful about the company’s strategic and tactical thinking.

Once they get that earful, especially about the company’s next-gen digital know-how, they tend



Opposite page and this page, top: Klick creatives produced mutually supporting online and print elements for Novartis’s Zykadia—an online illustration left, a brochure above. This page, above: Apps for Taiho Oncology that patients can access via smartphone or computer

to stick around for a bit. Klick isn’t keen to discuss client/brand specifics, but the company is known to do its share of work for Pfizer, Roche, Sanofi, Novartis and AstraZeneca.

According to Klick president Lori Grant, a great majority of the agency’s new business (“close to 90%”) comes from existing clients. “It speaks to the strength of those partnerships,” she says. “We have an entire client experience team now, which works to make sure the relationships we have stay tight and focused and generate a real impact.” Segal, in fact, adds that impact alone is no longer enough: “We’ve been working to make sure there is a massive value-add in every interaction with Klick. That’s the new standard we’re holding ourselves to.”

Along those lines, Klick’s recent innovations have a decided mad-scientist feel to them (that’s a compliment). The agency formally debuted its Sensei Labs arm in 2014, hoping to ease the often-challenging launch process for biotech companies.

It invested heavily in what Grant calls “science visualization,” programs and technology designed to help audiences “really experience an advancement in medicine in a way they haven’t before.” One of Klick’s Oculus Rift installations allows the user to travel through a blood vessel in the throes of an allergic reaction. There’s more where that came from: In June Klick announced a partnership with ARHT Media to use “a suite of products involving 3-D, holographic and proximity marketing technology” in the agency’s programming, according to a press release.

Then there are the company’s efforts in the realm of thought leadership, which expanded significantly in early 2015 with the introduction of its MUSE series of experiential events. “We realized that there were a lot of formal conferences but that they tended to skew toward purely industry people,” Segal explains.

“So we started to run some experiments where we’d bring in a different mix of people. The best comparison is the salons from the Age of Enlightenment, but instead of poets and philosophers and painters we invited physicians and researchers and people from academia.” The first four MUSE get-togethers, held in Boston, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, proved such a success that Klick is already working to get the next batch on the schedule.

Factor in Klick’s other programming—like the inaugural Klick Ideas Exchange in June, which served as an opening event for the BIO International Convention and was keynoted by a fella you might’ve heard of, name of Bill Clinton—and it’s clear that the company’s ambition as a thought leader matches its ambition as a health-care marketer.

“There are similarities,” Segal says. “We’re trying to inspire new connections. We’re trying to help people contextualize the human impact of the work we do. With all these changes happening in our landscape, we’re going to keep trying to inoculate ourselves against the status quo.”

—Larry Dobrow



AT THE HELM
Leerom Segal,
co-founder and CEO

PERFORMANCE
Revenues above \$100 million (estimated at \$115 million), up 30% over 2013

HIGHLIGHTS
New work from old clients Pfizer, Roche, Sanofi, Novartis and AstraZeneca

Formally debuted its Sensei Labs arm in 2014

CHALLENGES
Trying to “inoculate” itself against the status quo

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