



**AT THE HELM**  
David Nakamura,  
founder

**PERFORMANCE**  
Revenues above \$20 million; head count doubled

**HIGHLIGHTS**  
Streamlined operations and shortened the company name

Brought on Sophy Regelous as SVP, chief technology and operations officer, and Lisa Hunt, SVP and director of patient engagement

**CHALLENGES**  
Differentiating brands accurately and truly

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

## NATREL

Bolstering an agency from within to meet consumers' needs



### No doubt you'll read plenty of stories in this issue

about agency leaders retooling their offerings in search of a greater slice of the marketing pie. However, it's unlikely any will have made such a dramatic impact in such a short time as Natrel.

In March 2014 founder David Nakamura hatched an optimistic three-year plan to double the size of his agency. He would rebrand/reposition the business and deploy a smart new methodology for differentiating brands. It quickly became apparent that, although his strategy was effective, his projected timeline was way off—by the end of the year he had already doubled both its head count and its revenue.

How did he do it? Nakamura recognized the need to transform Natrel to match the changing needs of a healthcare landscape in which it was becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate products. So the agency developed a “bilateral branding methodology,” combining the intellectual power of positioning and messaging with “Persona ID,” a proprietary process that leverages the power of brand personality and emotions.

“It allows us to reveal the brand soul,” he says. “More importantly, those elements typically aren't as regulated as [product] features and benefits.”

Before taking this fresh approach to the industry, Natrel streamlined its own brand, dropping “Communications” from its name and adopting the tagline “Differentiating Differently.” And, as he

understates it, “It worked out fabulously for us.”

It certainly did. By the end of 2014, revenues had doubled to more than \$20 million on the back of nine new assignments, while head count increased from 45 to 90. Interestingly, global business now accounts for one third of revenue.

New assignments included three global AOR wins from Bayer (Eylea, injection for wet age-related macular degeneration, and two contraceptives: Mirena, plus another in development); two global assignments from CSL Behring for bleeding disorders; Otsuka's *H. pylori* test kit, BreathTek; Pharmaderm's Kerydin for toenail fungus; Strativa's Nascobal for B12 deficiency; and an unbranded disease-awareness campaign for BioMarin.

Aside from identifying a need within the marketplace to truly differentiate brands, Nakamura says the other contributing factor to the agency's success was hiring exceptional talent. “As we were winning business, the biggest challenge was to find skilled, passionate people who wanted to excel at their craft,” he says. “When you have rapid expansion, it's difficult to maintain your agency culture, or soul. But if you react quickly to missteps, you can do it.”

Recent senior hires include Sophy Regelous, SVP, chief technology and operations officer, who joined from ICC Lowe and oversees service operations and IT; and Lisa Hunt, who was named SVP, director of patient engagement.

In terms of industry trends, Nakamura is glad to see pharma companies are paying more attention to patients. “In the past they dedicated almost all of



Above left: Natrel's print ad for Ryтары's Impax. Above: Online content directing physicians to Nascobal's Par.

their resources to generating prescriptions,” he says. “But now, with analytics and data, and the ability to customize messaging, they are realizing that there are certain touchpoints that really make a difference when you communicate with a patient.”

Nakamura adds that Natrel is working to identify the exact types of programs that engage patients' trust. “We have to change the paradigm from [patients'] thinking that we capitalize on their misfortune of having a disease to their truly believing that we are invested in this with them.”

—James Chase

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