

Abelson Taylor

Independent shop stays afloat with 4-5% growth, 16 new brands under its belt



“The displacement and turmoil in the pharma industry has, in a strange way, worked to our advantage”

—Dale Taylor

AbelsonTaylor’s 4-5% growth this year represents a further tapering off—compared with an 11% growth this time last year—but the agency did manage to bring in 16 new brands, 10 in the first half of 2010, according to Dale Taylor, president and CEO.

Even if some areas of Abelson’s business are down, others are growing rather quickly. The agency has “beefed up DTC staff” in response to winning more business in the consumer realm. “We have six campaigns on TV right now, which is unusual for an agency that four years ago said it didn’t want to do DTC,” says Taylor. Additionally, Abelson has expanded its work in digital, and “continues to hire producers and programmers” to accommodate new business.

Agency leadership includes Taylor, Keith Stenlund, VP chief financial officer, Jay Carter, director of client services, and Stephen Neale, SVP, executive creative director. In total, the agency hired 50 people since June 2009, including Steve Curran, director of information technology, Lisa Totino, senior account supervisor, was hired for a new position tasked with overseeing social

media initiatives, and Kathy Kraft was hired to fill a new position responsible for overseeing broadcast trafficking and talent management for the agency’s broadcast portfolio. Kraft’s title is production business affairs manager, according to Taylor. Headcount rests at 402, currently.

Of the new brands won in the last 12 months, Taylor says most came without lifting a finger. “In the last few years, the vast majority of our new business wins have come without a pitch,” says Taylor.

One of the reasons for these kinds of wins, per Taylor, has to do with close individual relationships the agency has formed across the industry. “The displacement and turmoil in the pharma industry has, in a strange way, worked to our advantage,” explains Taylor. “We’ll do work with individuals on the client side that end up leaving the company, and then after they land a new position, we get a call and get hired.”

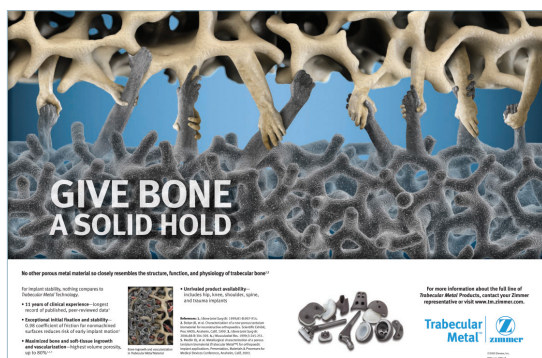
Jay Carter calls winning business without a pitch a “demonstratively different” phenomenon at Abelson-Taylor. “I think it’s a factor of [AbelsonTaylor] being a more mature agency now, and having a broad base of clients who have moved around, and that trust us,” he says, echoing Taylor.

Both Taylor and Carter declined to name specific clients, citing stricter confidentiality agreements with clients. Wins included consumer and professional duties on four lipid products, a “major” HIV brand, and a “new” insomnia treatment. Other wins include a brand for infant respiratory distress, an upper respiratory antibiotic, a “first-in-class drug” for serious autoimmune disease, and new therapies for post herpetic neuralgia, post-surgical pain, and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

For Abbott Nutrition, the agency’s sole OTC portfolio of brands (which includes campaign work for Similac baby formula), Taylor says the agency continues to have a good time with the materials. “[Abbott Nutrition brands] have been fabulous...it’s a wonderful way to express the creativity of the work done here,” says Taylor.

Asked to provide a specific example of a recent campaign, Carter points to creative supporting Allergan’s Restasis eye drops. The ad features an eyeball with a nearly-empty fuel gage superimposed onto the iris. The message for doctors: use Restasis now, instead of waiting until the patients’ real tears are too low. Carter says sales reps love the campaign, and are “finding that it’s opening doors that would otherwise have been shut.”

Questioned about a unique Abelson Taylor offering, Taylor describes a program created for a client in the oncology space, that “essentially allows physicians, with the help of a sales rep, to create a patient profile”—in this case, for the iPad. The program allows physicians and reps to select for an individual patient’s characteristics, and then pair that profile with a patient that participated in a major clinical study. “If you were interested in seeing how the drug performed in women over 50 with red hair, you could select those parameters, and we could search out similar patients within the clinical trial and show how they performed,”



Above: A journal ad for Zimmer's Trabecular Metal Products for hip, knee, shoulder and trauma implants

explains Taylor.

With growing DTC and digital capabilities, many of Abelson's clients are beginning to like the idea of one-stop shopping, according to Taylor. "We're seeing a tendency to [consolidate consumer and professional duties] on the part of many clients. A lot of people who have considered us primarily as being an HCP agency, have looked at our DTC and CRM capabilities, and said, 'We'd like you to do all of it,'" says Taylor, adding that consolidation across target audiences allows for easier campaign coordination. "We can make sure that messages are consistent across channels, that regulatory concerns are shared across channels, that clinical data is well understood on both sides, and that there's no confusion about what we can and cannot say," says Taylor. The bulk of Abelson's business still resides in the professional space; Taylor says only 15-20% is consumer-facing materials. Journal advertising across the industry is down, but "we still think it's an incredibly effective way to send branded messages to physicians," says Taylor. "As books become thinner, the ads

that are running become more prominent."

Taylor says the agency created nearly 100 digital sales aids this year, and some clients have gone completely paperless, while others still use traditional sales aids, and many do both. With digital sales aids, analytics are more reliable, insofar as a client can track what's exposed to a physician, and how much time a physician spent on a given page or story, says Taylor.

Carter says what's interesting about digital is the breadth of its use. "Digital spans the full spectrum, from tools that are used with a physician in an interactive visual aid, to convention floor tools, to lunch and learn, and all the way over to social media. The substantial and varied array of activities makes going to work interesting for an enormous number of our staff."

New growth in digital brings new concerns, and Taylor is waiting for social media guidelines FDA promised to deliver by the end of the year. "FDA is getting much more rigorous about safety information," says Taylor, adding that some clients are cagier than others about restrictions. "There are times when we are presenting safety and promotional information with absolutely equal weight," says Taylor. "We've done equal prominence and equal type sizes, because it's becoming a big issue, particularly for sensitive clients."

Looking forward, Taylor says the industry as a whole will face challenges associated with belt-tightening at the client level. "The healthcare reform bill will take a lot of margin away from our clients, and they will look to their agencies to be more efficient, more effective and to cut out steps that aren't needed in the development process, because budgets are going to get tighter and tighter," says Taylor. "That's not going to change, to say nothing of the disappearance of so many blockbuster brands from the marketplace over the next three or four years." —Ben Comer



AT THE HELM

Dale Taylor, president and CEO

PERFORMANCE

Saw growth of 4-5% compared to 11% the previous year

HIGHLIGHTS

Landed 16 new brands, including 10 in the first half of 2010

Wins include consumer and professional duties on four lipid products, a "major" HIV brand and a "new" insomnia treatment

"Beefed up DTC staff" to compensate for additional consumer work

Created nearly 100 digital sales aids in the past year

Hired 50 people since June 2009, including Steve Curran, director of IT; Lisa Totino, senior account supervisor; and Kathy Kraft, production business affairs manager

CHALLENGES

Figuring out FDA's unclear social media guidelines

Belt-tightening at the client level

Dealing with the health-care reform bill

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 173

For patients with seizures associated with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome (LGS) inadequately controlled with 1-3 AEDs*

Add Powerful Seizure Control To Patients' Lives

Important Safety Information

- BANZEL is contraindicated in patients with Familial Short QT syndrome.
- Antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) and epilepsy itself increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or behavior in patients. Patients, their caregivers, and families should be informed of the risk and advised to monitor and report any emergence or worsening of depression, suicidal thoughts or behavior, or any unusual changes in mood or behavior or thoughts of self-harm. If these symptoms occur, consider if it may be related to the AED or illness.
- Use of BANZEL has been associated with central nervous system-related adverse reactions, such as somnolence or fatigue, coordination abnormalities, dizziness, gait disturbances, and ataxia.
- Formal cardiac ECG studies demonstrated shortening of the QT interval (up to 20 msec) with BANZEL. Caution should be used when administering BANZEL with other drugs that shorten the QT interval.
- Multi-organ hypersensitivity syndrome has been reported in association with BANZEL therapy. In clinical trials, hypersensitivity reactions occurred in children less than 12 years of age and within 4 weeks of starting BANZEL therapy. If this reaction is suspected, BANZEL should be discontinued and alternative treatment started. All patients who develop a rash while taking BANZEL must be closely supervised.
- As with all AEDs, BANZEL should be gradually withdrawn to minimize the risk of increased seizure frequency.

Proven efficacy that may offer hope to patients with LGS

- 42.5% reduction in tonic-clonic seizures with BANZEL¹ vs 1.4% increase with placebo (P<0.0001)^{1,2}
- 32.7% reduction in total seizures with BANZEL vs 11.7% reduction with placebo (P<0.002)^{1,2}
- Mostly mild to moderate and transient adverse events¹
- Titration can be as rapid as 1-2 weeks¹

*In all patients with epilepsy treated with BANZEL in double-blind, adjunctive therapy studies, the most commonly observed adverse reactions were headache, dizziness, fatigue, somnolence, and nausea.

Please see the brief summary of Prescribing Information on the following page.

References: 1. BANZEL[®] (rufinamide) [Prescribing Information]. Woodbury, NY: Eisai Inc.; 2008. 2. Glauber T, Kluge U, Scharfetter K, Wolke S, Pohlmann C, Aron J. Rufinamide in generalized seizures associated with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome. *Ann Neurol*. 2008;10:1200-1208.

AEDs = antiepileptic drugs. Titration up to 12 weeks, controlled, double-blind, multicenter, placebo-controlled, parallel-group trial to assess the effectiveness of BANZEL in reducing inadequately controlled seizures associated with LGS in patients (n = 136) who had been treated with 1-3 concomitant stable oral AEDs.

BANZEL[®]
(rufinamide) 200, 400 mg TABLETS
Power. Control. Hope.

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Above: A professional ad for Eisai's Banzel for seizure treatment; Far left: Part an ad for MPI Research