



AT THE HELM

Mike Myers, president, and Guy Mastrion, chief global creative officer

PERFORMANCE

"A successful 2009"

HIGHLIGHTS

Grew organically with existing clients URL Pharma and Lilly/Amylin

Added assignments from Biogen Idec, Astellas Pharma US and Lantheus

Launched Pixels & Pills blog with Zemoga

CHALLENGES

Headcount down to 100

Bouncing back after losing Stiefel business

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 171

"We kind of stutter-stepped a bit during the economic downturn, just like everyone else"

—Mike Myers

Palio

Interactive agency partnership proves fruitful in an otherwise bumpy year

When discussing their fortunes during 2009 and 2010, most healthcare marketers allude to their digital expertise—how, by establishing a presence on Facebook and Twitter, they have learned everything that can be known about social media. When pressed for details about what they're doing differently, however, they tend to sputter a few words about "online communities" and change the topic.

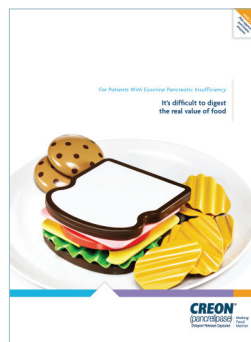
Thus when Palio president Mike Myers rhapsodizes about Pixels & Pills, a medical marketing blog launched last August in conjunction with interactive firm Zemoga, one is conditioned to expect very little. Imagine the surprise, then, when it proves one of the rare agency-fueled communications vehicles that not only tackles interesting topics but also offers updates on a near-daily basis. The writing is both clever and buzzword-averse; recent posts have weighed in on everything from the demise of the core visual aid to marketing in regions where DTC advertising remains prohibited.

Unlike many of its peers, Palio walks the digital walk, which at least partially explains the company's successful 2009. "We kind of stutter-stepped a little bit during the economic downturn, just like everyone else," Myers admits, noting that overall headcount dropped by 8-10 staffers, to around 100 total, due to attrition.

A year past its 10th birthday, Palio set off on a mission "to provide clients with thinking you don't see at other healthcare shops," Myers says. The relationship with Zemoga, a well-regarded interactive agency that has worked with Viacom, ING and Sony Music, certainly helped along those lines. "We'd partnered with them over the years. Their evolution into the healthcare space and ours into interactive—we thought it was a good idea to do it jointly," Myers explains.

Outside of the usual get-to-know-you issues ("How do we make this thing seamless to customers?"), the partnership quickly revved into gear. That said, Myers shrugs off the notion that healthcare marketing has metamorphosed into something entirely different over the last half-decade. "Our core creative product—coming up with ideas based on insight and executing them in a meaningful way—has not changed. How we go about doing that, given the regulatory environment and new-media landscape, has," he says.

During the last 12 months, Palio added assignments from existing clients URL Pharma (for Fibrivor) and Eli Lilly/Amylin Pharmaceuticals (for once-weekly Byetta). Other client additions included Biogen Idec (for Lixivaptan), Astellas Pharma US (for Amevive



Left: Professional ad for Solvay Pharmaceuticals' Creon; Right: Journal ad for URL Pharma's Colcrys

and Protopic) and Lantheus (for medical imaging).

Palio did, however, shed an account or two. Its relationship with Stiefel Laboratories ended when the company was purchased by GlaxoSmithKline ("We're not a GSK preferred agency—enough said," Myers notes philosophically.), while it parted ways with Cephalon when Provigil went off patent.

Asked to identify a few pieces of recent work that are emblematic of Palio's thinking and execution, Myers replies with the standard crack: "All of it." Still, he believes that the firm's promotion of URL's Colcrys and Solvay Pharmaceuticals' Creon stand with anything Palio has ever done. "Any agency president would be lying if he said every piece of work his company did in a 12-month period was stellar," Myers admits. "But I can say, without any reservation, that over the last year we produced our best body of work in any year-long period in our history. If I can say at this time next year that both we and our clients are proud of the work we did, everything else will have taken care of itself." —Larry Dobrow