

AT THE HELM

Tom Simons, CEO and chief creative officer

PERFORMANCE

Up about 8% year-to-date

HIGHLIGHTS

Won major initiative for Blue Cross Blue Shield's national association

Launched patient-centric website (with mobile apps) for Emerson Hospital

Hired Annemarie Crivelli, associate director, digital services; Mike Kirkpatrick, director of digital operation; and John Kemp, director, business dev.

CHALLENGE

Reconciling social media in a heavily regulated world

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

“Spend may get back to where it was, but the way it’s spent and measured is going to be different”

—Tom Simons

Partners + simons

Firm stayed afloat by retaining clients, utilizing healthcare reform expertise

Though client cutbacks took a 10% bite out of Boston shop Partners + simons’ revenue last year, CEO and chief creative officer Tom Simons is pleased that business is trending up this year.

“Year-to-date we’re up about 8%, and I feel really good about that,” Simons says. “We didn’t lose any clients last year—they just spent less money on advertising.”

Business is split about evenly between traditional advertising and digital work. Last year’s wins include a major initiative for Blue Cross Blue Shield’s national association; additional print and interactive business from Proventys (predictive tests); a global campaign for Parexel (CRO); and a physician-facing campaign for ConforMIS (orthopaedic implants and devices). The agency also just completed launching a new patient-centric website (including mobile apps) for Emerson Hospital in Boston.

“The recession flattened business for about nine months,” notes Simons. “There’s movement now...but everything is fundamentally reset. Spend may get back to where it was, but the way it’s spent and the way it’s measured is going to be materially different.”

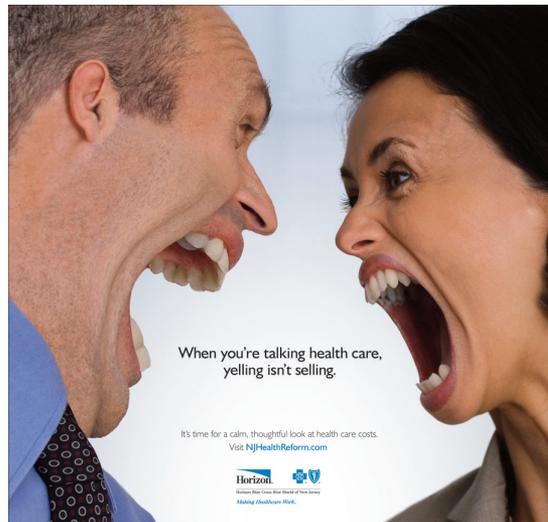
Simon calls healthcare reform “a game changer,” noting that Partners + simons is very well positioned to help clients adapt. “Healthcare reform kind of got its

start [in Massachusetts] four years ago when universal insurance was written into law,” he explains. “We’ve got some understanding—as a state and as an agency—about the implications. It’s been really interesting and professionally challenging, and it creates opportunity for us outside of Massachusetts, because of the domain expertise we have.”

Digital work continues to increase. He says creating digital environments in which clients can interact with consumers is becoming imperative and notes that many clients benefit and learn from exchanging information that “sates consumer appetite.”

The agency has successfully trained existing talent to meet increasing digital demands, and Simons also expects to hire more digital talent this year. Headcount held steady last year at 63 with no layoffs. “When people with traditional backgrounds left, we replaced them with people who have interactive capabilities,” he says.

Key hires included Annemarie Crivelli, associate director, digital services; Mike Kirkpatrick, director of digital operation; and Jon Kemp, director, business development, health practice.



Above: One print ad from a major initiative created for Blue Cross Blue Shield’s national association

From a new business standpoint, the agency will continue to actively market its healthcare reform experience and expertise. Simons expects to end this year up more than 10%.

“Clearly one of biggest challenges going forward is how to reconcile social media in such a heavily regulated environment,” Simons says. “It’s something everyone is wrestling with. There are people who are using it as an objective instead of as a strategy, and it’s not integrated into an ongoing program that has clearly defined business objectives. Other people are paralyzed and terrified because they can’t control the messages. Everybody knows the world is going in that direction. There’s got to be an acceptable marketing platform, but... not a lot of best practices have been defined yet.” —Tanya Lewis