



AT THE HELM

Clockwise: Al Topin, president; Tanja Noren, group supervisor; Dennis Gilroy, VP, CFO; Prill Kozel, associate CD; Lori Kewin, director of account service; John Diaz: VP, CD; Abby Mansfield, VP, CD and Barclay Missen, director of digital comms

PERFORMANCE

"Solid year"

HIGHLIGHTS

Won new business with Quest Diagnostics, Mission Pharmacal and an AOR assignment for Vetter

Working on new business pipeline and growing

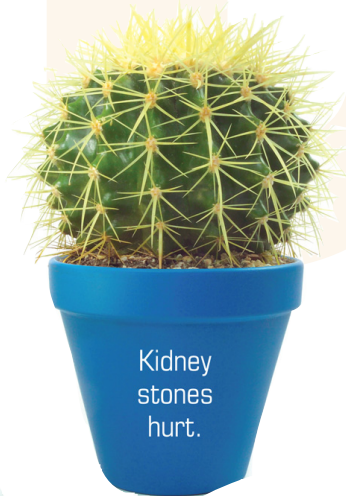
CHALLENGE

Dealing with the industry's "significant flux"

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

Topin & Associates

'Flexible' shop provides strategy to its clients, grows at a steady pace



It was a solid year for Chicago shop Topin & Associates (T&A). President Al Topin reports revenue was up 8% to 10%, and headcount has held steady at about 30 since 2008 with no layoffs. Topin is pleased that the agency grew despite some client side cutbacks.

"Part of it is good fortune in terms of our client mix," he says. "A lot of times midsized agencies are in a better position. Giant agencies can be very vulnerable because actual media numbers were definitely down. Large agencies depend on a certain amount of launches, and the FDA has seen to it that that's going to slow down. We do a lot of [direct marketing], sales aids, consulting and digital. We've been fortunate by the mix [of our business]."

The agency began working with Quest Diagnostics last year, winning several projects that have continued into this year. Mission Pharmacal awarded two launches—for a CitraNatal product (prenatal vitamins) and for a new dosage form of its kidney stone treatment Urocit-K. Other wins included an AOR assignment for Vetter Pharma International, and Terumo Cardiovascular Systems awarded the launch concept for a new device for endoscopic vessel harvesting.

Topin notes that digital work continues to be a

growth driver for both T&A and the industry.

"Changes in the healthcare industry and the ad industry are driven by the additional channels that are offered by digital," Topin explains. "All agencies have had to find the right way to deal with that. We continue to evolve...making sure digital is a series of channels and opportunities but not just the profit center. If you make it a separate department, you're shortchanging clients. I don't want to go to a client... with six tactics that don't have a strategy. We continue to grow with digital and understand it by making sure all our people are well versed in it. But digital is only one component to help clients achieve their goals."

The agency has created its own laptop detailing engine that Topin says also extends to eDetails. "I don't feel the rep force is going away," he adds. "I felt it was worth the investment."

The FDA is certainly playing a major role in the agency business. Topin notes that slower launches and launch restrictions have resulted in agencies becoming "more versed in very restrictive use of communications and promotion." He says T&A is "very versed in using REMS programs supporting exactly how the FDA wants more the delicate issues dealt with."

This year is shaping up to be another good year, though Topin notes that the industry will continue to experience "significant flux" over the next several years. He's working on the new business pipeline,



Above: Website for Mission Pharmacal's Tindamax; Top: Part of a journal ad for Mission's Urocit-K

and he expects to hire two or three people this year. He's also focused on creating more efficiency, because continuing pressure on client budgets has demanded that the agency provide the same level of work or more on smaller budgets.

"As opposed to reinventing themselves, agencies have to evolve a business model that allows them to be flexible but not over reactive," Topin explains. "We provide strategy and execution. We're able to sit with clients at the table as more of the planning is going on. We're not just handed a strategy and expected to execute." — Tanya Lewis

"Changes in the industry are driven by the additional channels that are offered by digital"

—Al Topin