



AT THE HELM

John Puglisi, president and CEO; Tim Millas, VP, creative director; and Adrienne Lee, executive managing director

PERFORMANCE

The last 12 months saw success for the agency

HIGHLIGHTS

Tapped as AOR for several UCB brands and AOR for Smith & Nephew

Added project work from Procter & Gamble and Daiichi Sankyo

Established a Strategic Insight and Planning group

CHALLENGE

Staffing the right way

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Beacon Healthcare Communications

‘Nimble’ firm finds success while changing its stance in a crowded market



In terms of offering true insight into the way an organization goes about its business, an ad tagline generally has about as much probative value as the number of Ps in the organization’s name. Indeed, in their marketing materials any number of firms rhapsodize about sector-specific intelligence or mad digital skills. Nobody, not even the folks charged with dreaming up the boasts and blusters, actually believes they correlate with reality.

And yet Beacon Healthcare Communications wants to prove itself as the exception to the rule. Coined last year, the agency’s “we hear you” tagline seems less an attempt to differentiate itself in a crowded marketplace as it does a rallying cry. It was debuted in tandem with the firm’s non-self-promotional blog, “The Listener,” and appears to inform its every relationship.

“It’s really what we’re about,” says Beacon president and chief executive officer John Puglisi. “We’re not order-takers. We don’t start conversations with, ‘OK, here’s what you gotta do.’”

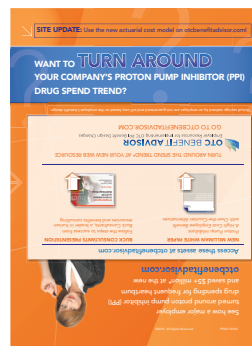
This deliberative approach paid off over the last 12 months, as Beacon affirmed its status as one of the most nimble agencies in its competitive set. A slight tweak to its modus operandi contributed to the successes. “We moved away from the global focus a little bit, to

a much more individual approach,” explains Beacon vice president/creative director Tim Millas, soon to move into the role of chief creative officer. “Each person, whether a physician or a patient or a caregiver, has a decision to make. Individual approaches have been much more effective and efficient for many of our clients.”

To hone the strategies and tactics that will appeal to those individuals, Beacon established a Strategic Insight and Planning group. The group, five strong as of late May, has been charged with handling the research-related tasks that too often fall by the wayside. “Your traditional account group is so focused on the day-to-day business that sometimes they don’t have time to look at the marketplace and how it’s evolving,” Puglisi notes. “We’ve always had a strong strategic underpinning. What we did with this is formalize it a little more.”

Beacon won its share of business over the last year, both from existing clients and new ones. It was tapped as the managed markets agency of record for several UCB brands, including Neupro (for Parkinson’s disease), Vimpat (epilepsy) and Cimzia (rheumatoid arthritis). It snared consumer AOR status for Smith & Nephew’s Supartz (relief of knee pain) and professional AOR status for an Emisphere brand set to debut later this year. Project work arrived from Procter & Gamble and Daiichi Sankyo. The single account loss was for a Boehringer Ingelheim product that didn’t make it to market.

In the months ahead, Beacon plans to address what Puglisi identifies as the firm’s most pressing challenge:



Left: An unbranded journal ad, created for Procter & Gamble, regarding drug spend on proton pump inhibitors; Top: A consumer interactive campaign for Smith & Nephew’s Supartz

Staffing up in a way that makes sense in the context of today’s agency-client relationships. “At the beginning of the year, clients are feeling healthy about their budgets. But priorities change and sometimes [a relationship] becomes more project-oriented, as opposed to an agency-of-record way of working,” he says. “Under those circumstances, it’s challenging to staff up an organization like Beacon.”

Look for the company to jump its headcount past the current level of 75, mostly via the recruitment of staffers with specialized skills. “We’re hiring engineers to work in our interactive group and do things that, quite frankly, I don’t understand,” Puglisi jokes. “In the old days, it was just account people and creative people, but those days are long gone.” —Larry Dobrow

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—John Puglisi