



AT THE HELM

Executive team (l-r): Mike Hudnall, Michelle Kelly, Julie Ogles, Reid Connolly, and Tom Donnelly

PERFORMANCE

Team grew by “50%”

HIGHLIGHTS

Picked up 10 new account wins from Pfizer, Bayer HealthCare, Biogen Idec, Forest, Noven and GE Healthcare

Considering expansion, possibly “geographically or from a service perspective”

CHALLENGE

Staying away from one-way relationships and finding strategic partners

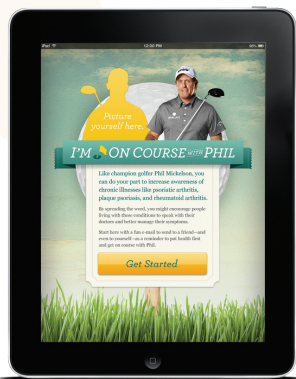
For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 171

“We like to think of ourselves as a full-service healthcare agency with a digital heritage”

—Reid Connolly

evoke interaction

Five-year-old firm expands offerings to include more than just its digital roots



Many healthcare media and marketing firms have spent the last 18 months in digital catch-up mode, either frantically attempting to achieve proficiency in the new-media skills clients that now demand or buying up smaller shops with such expertise. And then you have evoke interaction, whose evolution has proceeded in almost the exact opposite direction.

When it launched five years ago, evoke was technically a digital-first firm. However, in response to client demand, it has since expanded its offerings, to the extent that it's every bit the full-service firm that its competitors are.

This was the plan from the outset, evoke president B. Reid Connolly says.

“We consider ourselves unapologetically digital at our roots,” he explains. “But two or three years ago, clients started coming to us and saying, ‘You guys know our consumers better than our offline consumer agency. Want to take over our DTC?’ So, now we like to think of ourselves as a full-service healthcare agency with a digital heritage.”

It's difficult to gauge exactly how good or bad a year evoke enjoyed. Owing to its status as the child

of a publicly traded parent (global PR and healthcare communications giant Huntsworth), the firm does not disclose revenues or income. Connolly declines to give an exact headcount, allowing only that “evoke has grown the size of its team by over 50%” — which, in the absence of context, means that it could've gone from 2 staffers to 3 or from 2,000 to 3,000. Similarly, citing client preferences and legal obligations, Connolly says that the firm has scored “over 10 new account wins” from Pfizer, Bayer HealthCare, Biogen Idec, Forest Labs, Noven and GE Healthcare; he declines to identify brand names or nature of the assignments (AOR vs. project, etc.).

That said, evoke is well-regarded for both its work and for its dexterity within the context of agency/client relationships. Connolly attributes the latter to the agency's attitude as well as its selectiveness. To put it simply, evoke holds its clients to a high standard.

“People are so eager for business that they'll work with clients who aren't a good fit, whether from a product or a personality perspective or whatever. We don't do that. We make sure every client we're in business with will be a good partner for us,” he says, noting that evoke has stepped away from its share of one-way relationships.

“You can tell pretty early on. There are things we'll put up with — like how lots of clients refer to agencies as ‘vendors,’ which none of us like,” he continues. “But when a client starts treating an agency as a vendor, they usually get vendor-like work. We want to be a strategic partner. It takes work on both ends to get the best result [from a client/agency relationship].”



Above: Patient education for Novogyne's Vivelte-Dot; Top: An iPad app for chronic disease awareness

Connolly is cagey about what lies ahead for evoke, though he hints that the firm will consider expansion (“whether geographically or from a service perspective”) where it makes sense. While the firm may or may not hire additional staffers, any such growth will be careful and measured.

“We're pickier than most. We're not the type of agency that wins a piece of business and then brings in the people we need,” he stresses. “That's why you have quality issues with some of the behemoth agencies. At that size, you can be less picky. At a medium-sized firm like evoke, you can't hide the people who don't fit. We'll continue to take our time and do it right.”

—Larry Dobrow