



AT THE HELM

Allan Trent and David Nakamura, founding partners

PERFORMANCE

Added new business and grew organically; lost two accounts

HIGHLIGHTS

Added work from The Medicines Co., Corcept Pharmaceuticals, Meda and Dey Pharma

Went global with business from Axcan Pharma for Pylera

Altered hiring strategy

CHALLENGES

Helping clients navigate uncertain regulatory environment

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 169

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—Allan Trent

Natrel Communications

Founding partners compete in new business poaching, and it pays off

After running through a list of their firm’s account wins over the last year, Allan Trent and David Nakamura, the two founding partners of Natrel Communications, indulge themselves in a bit of banter. As it turns out, they do much of the agency’s new business poaching themselves, and have a bit of a competition brewing between them. “During 2010, David kind of beat me a little bit, so this year I’m gonna kick his butt,” Trent jokes, as Nakamura laughs in the background. “I’m telling you right now, though: He’s thinking the exact same thing.”

Judging by the results, maybe more firms ought to encourage such good-natured competitive squabbling among its new business rainmakers. A few years after refocusing its attention on makers of specialty products and the biotech niche, Natrel remained a favorite marketing partner of such entities. The Medicines Co. hired the firm for work on Cleviprex, a therapy for severe acute hypertension, while Corcept Pharmaceuticals tapped it for work on an agent designed to treat Cushing’s syndrome.

Longtime Natrel booster Meda Pharmaceuticals gave the agency the Xerese business, for cold sores; and Dey Pharma hired Natrel for work on EpiPen, for anaphylaxis. Only two accounts went away: a Behring prostate cancer drug (the agency’s contact on the brand team at Behring left the company) and Endo Pharmaceuticals’ Frova (the project to which Natrel was assigned was completed).

At the same time, 2010 was the year that Natrel truly went global. Bolstered and emboldened by a global

branding process formalized in 2009, Natrel snared a big piece of high-profile business: Axcan Pharma’s Pylera, for ulcer disease. This proved the firm’s global launch. “I can honestly say they selected us because of our branding process,” Nakamura notes.

When asked to identify a piece of work which they’re particularly proud of, in fact, both Nakamura and Trent point to Pylera. “We don’t have offices all around the world, like the holding companies say they do,” Trent quips. “To get the results we have so far is about the best advertisement for our abilities that there is.”

To accommodate its new business successes, Natrel altered its hiring strategies a bit. The firm sought quality instead of quantity, bringing aboard a host of experienced execs and empowering them. “David grabbed me by the arms and said, ‘There are all these great senior brand managers out there, looking for something to do in the wake of the pharma consolidation. This is our chance to really get better and smarter,’” Trent recalls.



Above: A journal ad for Dycomed’s Adoxa, indicated as adjunctive therapy (once a day) for severe acne

Thus while overall headcount is down—from 60 at this time last year to 50 now—Trent and Nakamura are both thrilled with the results. “They’ve given us such better connections with clients,” Nakamura notes.

Up next for Natrel: Helping its clients navigate an uncertain regulatory environment for their digital programs. While Nakamura acknowledges that pharma as a whole was “a little slower on the digital uptake,” he and Trent believe that companies have attained a certain level of comfort—and that agencies like Natrel can help push them further forward. “The dynamic is now starting to change,” Nakamura says. “People love the ideas, even if they’re still a little hesitant [due to the regulatory environment]. But there’s a level of comfort we didn’t see last year.” —Larry Dobrow