



AT THE HELM

Managing directors
Renee Mellas and Tim
Hawkey

PERFORMANCE

66% growth last year

HIGHLIGHTS

Nabbed work for
Merck's respiratory
franchise and Pfizer's
oncology arm

Executive suite shift
placed two agency
veterans at the top

Moving to new office
space to accommodate
increased headcount

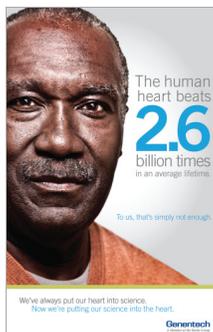
CHALLENGES

Roche/Genentech cut
off marketing support
for dalcetrapib

For contact details, ser-
vice offerings and client
roster, see Agency A-to-Z,
beginning on page 181

Area 23

Headcounts and accounts both go up at this Draftfcb spinoff agency



Area 23 has had a pretty quiet year—if you don't count the new top management, new business, new office space (as of next month) and 50 new employees. Just ask Renee Mellas, who joined Area 23 from Wishbone last September and now runs it with fellow managing director Tim Hawkey, who arrived from parent company Draftfcb Healthcare last June (the pair replaces Mike Guarino, promoted to chief strategic officer of the Draftfcb mothership).

"There haven't been too many days where we sat around with our feet up," she says, before adding in a more serious tone, "It feels like we're picking up a lot of momentum, which is always wonderful."

When an agency says its grown by 66% in one year, there are generally two possible responses: to ask the person making the claim to take a lie-detector test or to wonder whether that 66% growth was a jump from 10 staffers to 15. But Area 23 had 75 people under its roof last June and 125 this one, which means that the imminent office move was motivated by the surge in headcount rather than, say, a plumbing apocalypse. As for new business, the firm jumped from five clients and six brands to seven clients and 16 brands.

While some agency chiefs would celebrate the good fortune by flying the agency en masse to Aruba, Mellas was inclined to ask, "What's next?" A big reason

she returned to the Draftfcb family—her first job out of college was with the company—was the appeal of Area 23's positioning and culture. "Parent company resources, but with a personalized approach"—I think that's perfect," she says. "But now that we're pushing 125 people, how do you continue to sell that approach? And how do you not only keep that culture intact, but grow it into the next stage of its lifestyle?"

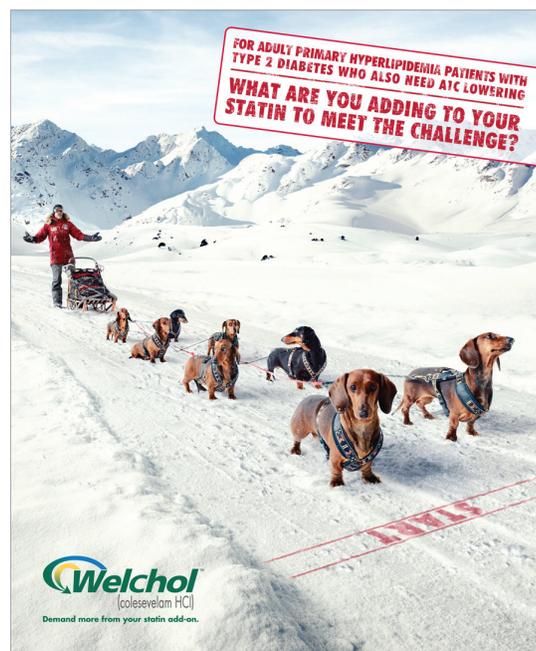
"Internally, we're doing more from a department perspective, which hopefully makes everyone feel like they're not only part of a growing agency, but also part of a team," she continues. "Externally, it's all about defining ourselves in a size-agnostic way. We like to think we make Archimedes, which is fairly small, feel just as important as we do Merck."

Merck's respiratory franchise (Dulera, Nasonex and Singulair, plus several products in the pipeline) ranked among Area 23's biggest wins in recent months, as did Pfizer's oncology arm (US/global). At the time, a win in a five-firm derby for AOR responsibilities for Roche/Genentech's cardiovascular drug dalcetrapib would have made the list. But after testing revealed a lack of clinically meaningful efficacy, Roche/Genentech decided to cut off marketing support for the product. That was one of two late-2011 wins from which Area 23 didn't fully benefit, the other being NeurogesX's pain patch Qutenza (it received a thumbs-down from the FDA's advisory committee in February).

Despite frustrations of that sort, Area 23 enters the second half of 2012 feeling confident. High on the list of priorities are managing those headcount/client surges and growing organically. Mellas believes the agency is ready to embrace both challenges. "It's great that we have smart people up top, but the strength of this agency is that there's no one MVP. The strength is the depth of our bench." —Larry Dobrow

"It feels like we're picking up a lot of momentum, which is always wonderful"

—Renee Mellas



Area23's assignments included work for both Genentech (above left) and Welchol (above)