



AT THE HELM

Deborah Wood, CEO

PERFORMANCE

Client roster grew to 31

HIGHLIGHTS

Got 12 new accounts and six Agency-of-Record assignments

Set up an agency branch in Chicago

Worked on such projects as creating a documentary on schizophrenia and setting up a heart-health clinic for a client

CHALLENGES

Ensuring that the agency's separate education units remain separate

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

“Truly, education is what we do on both sides of the company”

—Deborah Wood

DWA Healthcare Communications Group

A mission to educate leads to a broad communications practice

DWA Healthcare Communications Group is an agency that has a tightly focused mission: education. And it has two separate but complementary paths towards fulfilling this mission. One of those is Avant Healthcare Marketing, which takes care of the client education and marketing side of the agency's business, while its accredited CME Enterprise shop seeks out and fills education gaps. DWA unites these two pieces under its umbrella, keeping each education arm running as well as making sure they remain separate, thereby ensuring that their co-existence is within the confines of education regulations.

“We have to make sure we're keeping our clients safe,” is how CEO Deborah Wood sums up the strategy. This careful approach—which is one of the reasons that 12 accounts gravitated towards DWA's growing portfolio last year—is also seen in the way that Wood answers the question, “Have there been any surprises over the last year?” Her reply: “We try not to be surprised.”

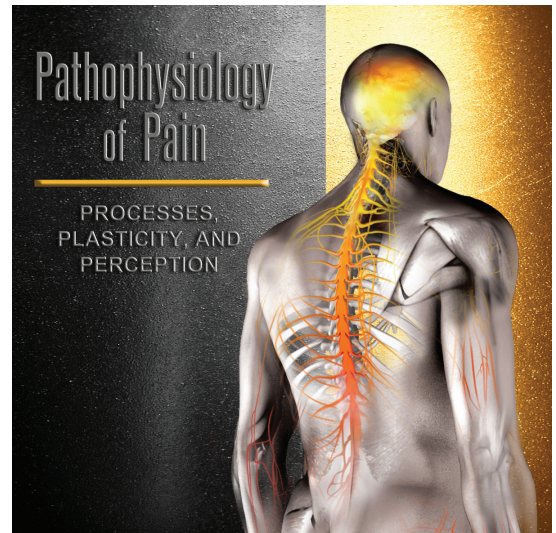
In addition to snagging those 12 new accounts, DWA was named the agency of record on six accounts across therapeutic categories that include neuroscience, oncology, diabetes, men's and women's health, and rheumatology. Pulling in that amount of work takes going beyond the textbook and helping clients find new ways to achieve education goals.

Director of Corporate Marketing Jeff Sears said Avant's clients are increasingly looking to educate themselves about their respective disease states, instead of just focusing on how to teach physicians. This has expanded Avant's business, which accounts for about 90% of DWA's revenues, to include such projects as creating a documentary about a schizophrenic's self-imposed medication withdrawal. It has also included setting up a heart-health clinic, which included blood

pressure checks and cholesterol screenings, at a client company. Sears says DWA has also seen an increased demand to go beyond presentations made up of “a bunch of slides,” and has stepped in with alternate materials that more directly engage their recipients, such as discussion guides and videos.

This approach goes to the heart of what Wood calls seeing things through “the customer lens”—a tack which helped the company build its account tally to 31 last year. It's prompted loyalty from DWA toward those clients as well. So much so, in fact, that when one of its clients moved west, Avant followed and set up a three-person shop so they could understand how the new environment could affect client needs and so they could offer the client on-the-spot solutions. Growth has also been robust enough for the Carmel, IN, agency to set down roots in Chicago.

Wood said part of this detailed understanding of clients comes from the expertise of staff who have worked in the medical field and bring that knowledge of real-world information challenges and wants to the curriculum-development side. She said DWA excels because of this added insight and then adds a



A piece from an Avant project for a non-branded disease state effort related to chronic pain

layer of additional training so employees are better able to funnel their outer expertise into the DWA experience.

On the other side of the house is the wholly separate four-person CME Enterprise. Its take on the consumer lens: instead of solving problems for one client, it surveys the medical field and takes note of medical education that's lacking. These efforts often include collaborating with multiple partners. Among the recent wins: snagging a grant to take on anticoagulation management education and to develop it with 10 other partners.

It may seem an odd fit for a business that is 90% marketing, but Wood says CME makes perfect sense because “Truly, education is what we do on both sides of the company.” —Deborah Weinstein