



AT THE HELM

Dorothy Wetzel, founder

PERFORMANCE

Rapid growth led to a quadrupling in headcount

HIGHLIGHTS

Worked on the launch of Incivek for Vertex Pharmaceuticals

Won Pfizer/Bristol-Myers Squibb account for Eliquis

Moved to larger New York offices and opened an office in Cambridge, Mass.

CHALLENGES

Setting priorities during a period of explosive growth

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Extrovertic Communications

A social-media startup turns itself into a strategic and creative force



Extrovertic Communications opened its doors in 2009 with a novel distinguishing proposition in mind: it would be the first firm to crack the challenges of social media within the context of healthcare marketing. As it turns out, Extrovertic was a year or three ahead of its time. “In 2009, it wasn’t as big as all of us thought it would be,” admits partner and “chief extrovert” Dorothy Wetzel, the Pfizer and Saatchi & Saatchi Healthcare veteran who founded the firm.

While clients might not have been ready to dive into the social-media pool, they saw in Extrovertic a savvy strategic partner. And so it was that the agency built its reputation. “We were lucky,” Wetzel recalls. “We talked to people at Vertex [Pharmaceuticals], who said, ‘Social media is interesting, but can you help us with our marketing and creative execution?’ That started a pattern. I always say that clients come for our strategy but stick around for our creative.”

Three years in, Extrovertic is enjoying its most successful stretch yet. The agency quadrupled its headcount, from 10 to 40, which prompted a pair of real-estate-related shuffles: it moved to a larger space in New York City and opened an office in Cambridge, Mass. Key staff additions included executive creative director Tom Millar (“I call him an ambidextrous

creative man, because he started out with a consumer background before switching to healthcare,” Wetzel enthuses) and partner Bill Fleming (“he’s got that consultant mindset”).

EMD Serono, which had previously tapped Extrovertic for project work, hired the agency to lead the marketing charge on behalf of Egrifta (for HIV-induced belly fat) and Gonal-F (for treatment of infertility). Pfizer/Bristol-Myers Squibb also joined the Extrovertic roster, as part of a strategy/planning assignment for anti-clotting drug Eliquis.

Work on behalf of Vertex—for the launch of Incivek, a Hepatitis-C drug, as consumer AOR—proved among the year’s highlights, given the unique nature of the assignment and agency/client relationship. “The challenges and the opportunities were tied closely together, in that we were both new companies,” Wetzel explains. “As a result, everybody was open to new ways and new ideas. Big companies have a strict formula for launching drugs. That’s great, because you have the road map, but sometimes the structure can be constricting, because there’s no freedom or will to do things differently. The night before the Incivek launch, we all had this wonderful warm feeling, like waiting for a child to be born.”

Structures and road maps, ironically enough, proved the agency’s biggest headaches over the last 12 months. As with any new firm experiencing explosive growth, Extrovertic struggled to prioritize. “It was a constant juggling act,” Wetzel admits. What advice would she give would-be agency founders? Get your internal house in order ASAP.



Extrovertic used its creativity on accounts for the Incivek launch (above left) and for Egrifta (above)

“Get the finance people on board before you think you need them,” she continues. “And as much as you’d like to have a flexible workforce base, be really careful. You can get great creative and strategy people who don’t want to work full-time. But once you get to a certain volume of client work, you need everybody on deck. You don’t want to have to chase anyone around.”

In the months ahead, Wetzel wants to “grow opportunistically” and hopes to hit the \$10 million revenue mark before the year is out. And the firm will take a second run at social media. “We want to launch a pharma-specific way of examining social-media intelligence and mining it. Clients are ready for it this time around.” —*Larry Dobrow*

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