



## AT THE HELM

Joe Kuchta, CEO

## PERFORMANCE

\$22 million in revenue—the agency's best year ever

## HIGHLIGHTS

Picked up new business from such long-term clients as Upsher-Smith, ProStrakan Group and APP Pharmaceuticals

Had a big year for product launches, including the uKnow peanut-allergy test

## CHALLENGES

Not letting social media, UX and mobile draw attention away from strategy and creativity

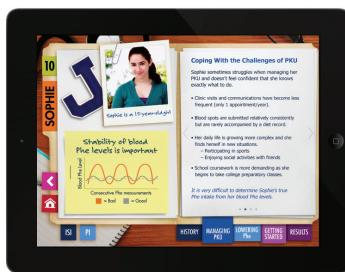
For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 181

**"We build everything around the trifecta of content, UX and design"**

—Joe Kuchta

# GA Communications Group

Taking a “newfangled” approach to established industry principles



**G**A Communication Group hit all-time high revenue of \$22 million last year, up from \$21.4 million in 2010. The Chicago-headquartered agency, one of the steadiest in the business, showed consistent growth and maintained a roster of long-standing relationships with such clients as Upsher-Smith.

New business from existing clients included AOR for ProStrakan Group’s cancer-related pain treatment Abstral, and AOR for Upsher-Smith’s probiotic Provella. The agency also won an AOR assignment to relaunch the hospital brand Ultiva; project work from APP Pharmaceuticals; multiple projects from Biomarin; and digital AOR designation for Obagi Medical Products’ entire skincare line.

It was also a big year for such launches as the uKnow peanut-allergy molecular blood test for long-time client Phadia, which Thermo Fisher Scientific acquired.

“In the old days we’d market a blood test to lab techs,” says CEO Joe Kuchta. “Over the last seven years, we’ve been marketing them to physicians. This campaign was geared towards pediatricians and moms and kids. Without digital and social media we probably couldn’t have communicated directly with patients as easily.”

All of the agency’s work includes digital aspects. Kuchta says it’s so integrated that he doesn’t even know if he can parse it out. Acquisition of a San Diego

digital shop in late 2009 and new hires, such as Richard Verne, director/UX, as well as Barclay Missen, who returned to the agency as creative director/UX, have strengthened capability.

“UX has always been part of everything, but now it’s almost a science,” Kuchta says. “We build everything around the trifecta of content, UX and design, and ensure they’re on equal footing. That’s not revolutionary—it’s how the world works now.”

Kuchta likes the opportunity digital provides to deliver in new ways, but also thinks agencies can lose sight of the importance of strategy and creative.

“We’re striving for the perfect mix of thinking, creative and executional ability,” he says. “We don’t want to get so caught up in UX, social media and mobile that we lose sight of what we’re doing. Strategy and creativity still have to pack a punch.”

“We’re not having to reinvent ourselves. We’re sticking to what we do and doing it in newfangled ways,” Kuchta continues. “For Hospira, the UX pathway is demo-ing pumps and systems on the iPad, not on the actual pump. Those are things reps love and things we couldn’t do before. We’ve done sales aids every day for 30 years. The vast majority now happen to reside on a tablet program. It’s just the new paper. We’re doing the same thing—supporting sales reps

**GA's work for the PKU treatment Kuvan (above left) and the V-Go insulin delivery device (above)**

and telling product stories—it’s just the tools are more dynamic and impactful.”

More talent is coming from outside healthcare, including folks with consumer agency and consumer product backgrounds, and finding good people hasn’t been a problem. Senior hires last year in addition to Verne and Missen were Holly McGregor, VP, account supervisor, and executive producer Steve Buecking.

The agency is in the final rounds of several pitches and working on a number of programs, including the launch of Valeritas’s V-Go insulin delivery device.

“I expect a strong, stable year in our normal 8% to 10% growth range,” Kuchta says. —Tanya Lewis