



**AT THE HELM**

Elizabeth Apelles, CEO

**PERFORMANCE**

On track to beat last year's performance by 20%

**HIGHLIGHTS**

A pathbreaking campaign projected the Lunesta moth onto the side of a New York hotel

Working relationships with such clients as Genentech, Sunovion and Continuum Health Partners

**CHALLENGES**

Making sure that cutting-edge technology doesn't overshadow a measured, well-thought-out approach

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

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—Elizabeth Apelles

# Greater Than One

After years of putting the client first, GTO steps into the agency spotlight



Giving the impression of stealth has been an overriding theme for the 90-person agency Greater Than One ever since its founding at the start of the aughts.

“When we started the company and we were thinking about a name, one of the first names we thought about was crop circle ... nobody knows what they are, but they are forces that appear and they are powerful and intriguing,” CEO Elizabeth Apelles said. But with the employee-owned shop piling up the awards since it first began landing accounts, Apelles says that it's finally time for them to bring the agency's name into the forefront and tout the work of the teams it has spread among offices in New York, San Francisco and Madrid. “We are now at a size that our clients are curious about why our name isn't out there more,” she said.

Although the work behind the splash may be stealth, their efforts are a jolt. As an example: the company's takeover of a side of New York's Gansevoort hotel for Sunovion's sleep aid Lunesta got over 2,000 YouTube views in one month.

Apelles speaks carefully, thoughtfully weighing her comments, a trait that seems to embody the way that the agency works with its clients: brand and messaging ideas will come, but only when they are ready. Sometimes the answers are not what clients want to

hear. Apelles said GTO didn't make it past a request-for-information presentation because a prospective client wanted to outfit its sales force with iPads so they could show providers PDFs of print materials. Apelles said the client asked, “Is this how you would do this?” Apelles said her group wanted to go beyond the new-is-good idea and “understand why they wanted to do this and if doctors want to see this.” She told the client that GTO would recommend a different approach. The client didn't invite them to pitch.

But giving clients what GTO thinks they need to hear, and not simply what they want to hear, is a central part of the strategy that makes the company work. That strategy has allowed the agency to amass a client roster that runs across entire healthcare continuum: Genentech's drugs Herceptin, Tarceva, Pertuzumab and Lucentis, for starters; Continuum Health Partners which encompasses three major New York hospitals; Sunovion's Omnaris; and Thompson Reuters Healthcare. This is in addition to sustaining back-to-back growth for 10 out of 12 years and being on track to beat last year's performance by 20%.

Apelles says that GTO clients, who tend to stick around for an average of at least five years, come to the agency because they want some help in figuring out what path their companies should take. “We rarely get ‘we want that,’ because that's not how our clients see us,” she said. Instead, Apelles says her clients are more intrigued by the reasons behind GTO's recommendations. Those reasons take many factors into account, primary among them is putting together campaigns that are thoughtful and will still be effective once



Two Greater-Than-One projects: the Omnaris app (above left) and HowIFightMS.com (above)

the half-life of the initial technology fades. This is particularly important for clients, but even more for a company where almost everything is digital (print ads account for just 4% of the business).

Yet enduring doesn't have to mean complex. For example, Apelles said that her group is helping a client navigate the potential impact of healthcare reform. Although this legislation is physically daunting and inherently knotty, Apelles brushes it off as just another problem that requires a solution, or “turning complexity into simplicity. And we do a really good job of it.” —Deborah Weinstein