



#### AT THE HELM

Allan Trent (left) and David Nakamura, founding partners

#### PERFORMANCE

Strong, but not quite up to the agency's stellar 2010 numbers

#### HIGHLIGHTS

Brought in business from such clients as Impax, Merz and Shionogi

Maintained A-list reputation among specialty pharma firms

#### CHALLENGES

Lost Lusedra business when Eisai stopped promoting the brand

Finding top new employees

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

**"Some clients are a little squeamish of the digital platform"**

—Allan Trent

## Natrel Communications

Tweaking a winning formula to help clients open the "digital doorway"



**N**atrel Communications founding partners Allan Trent and David Nakamura set themselves a goal at this time last year: bettering the firm's 2010 performance, which saw a big revenue bump and a sharp spike in its global profile. Due to a range of circumstances, they fell short of that goal.

"2010 was stellar. 2011 wasn't bad but it didn't match 2010, in terms of revenue and net income," says Trent. "We didn't do anything wrong; there's nothing we look back on and say, 'Yeah, we blew that one.' We just had some bad luck with clients." By way of example, he points to Eisai, which stopped promoting its sedative Lusedra. "It just didn't work out in the marketplace," he says.

That said, the final six months of 2011 found Natrel on a new-business hot streak. The agency scored eight account wins, including Impax Pharmaceuticals (for a Parkinson's disease drug), Merz Pharmaceuticals (for the global launch of an Alzheimer's treatment) and Shionogi (Moxatag, an antibiotic; asthma drug Orapred ODT; and pain meds Rybix and Naprelan). It

also added work from existing clients Terumo (for its SurGuard 3 syringe) and CSL Behring (for its coagulation franchise). "Things really clicked during the third and fourth quarter [of last year]," Trent says.

The wins affirmed Natrel's A-list standing with pharma firms that manufacture and market specialty products. "Those particular clients require both marketing and scientific expertise. There's plenty of opportunity there, but the problem is finding good talent to service it," Nakamura notes. Along those lines, Natrel has tweaked its hiring strategies in order to find more "students of marketing," as Trent calls them.

"It's hard to find those star players out there, who know the science and who have the digital drive, but also are interested in continuing to educate themselves," he continues. "What we've been trying to do is find the best people through our relationships with clients and former clients. Headhunters haven't been working out for us." Natrel's staff is 55-strong, a bit smaller than at this time last year.

Trent and Nakamura also stress that digital-mindedness has become a must-have trait for all current and would-be Natrel employees. Digital work comprised 25% of the firm's portfolio in 2011, but that figure should jump into the 35-40% range by the end of 2012. The problem? Small and mid-sized clients generally don't have the budgets—or sometimes the stomach—for digital experimentation.

"We're not working with Pfizer or Merck. It's never, 'Let's try it. We have a couple hundred thousand dollars to throw at you,'" Trent says, with no frustration. "Some clients are a little squeamish of the digital platform,



Ads warning adults about the threat of strep throat (above left) and a print ad for Pylera (above)

so it's on us to present confidence to them and then provide the analytics to show these programs work. That's when they open up the digital doorway."

In the months ahead, Natrel will further evolve its base of digital experience. Another priority: grounding Nakamura. "David set a world record last year. He flew around the world a couple of times," Trent jokes. "It's like, 'Enough already!'" —Larry Dobrow



For contact details, rosters, wins, losses, billings and creative samples of more than 130 firms see our Agency A-to-Z, pages 181 to 219