

GSW

Now “Fueled by Blue Diesel” and ready to become a new kind of agency



“We have a desire to lead the market in making human connections”

—Joe Daley

GSW Worldwide was not exactly a mom-and-pop operation prior to the end of 2012, when it merged with inVentiv Health sibling Blue Diesel to form what’s being called, at least for now, GSW Fueled by Blue Diesel. But when you throw another 125 staffers, 22 new brands and an in-house product development shop into the mix, you’ve exited the domain of traditional 21st century agency and entered the one of new-era amalgam. “Ambitious” feels like an appropriate descriptor in this instance.

And yet to hear agency president Joe Daley and director of creativity Bruce Rooke tell it, each GSW hire, client addition and structural/philosophical tweak was motivated by a single purpose. “We’re developing an organization for what the future of our business requires,” Daley says. “The timing is right to challenge ourselves and the marketplace,” Rooke adds.

Take the merger with Blue Diesel, a company renowned for having gone digital long before most agency execs even started talking about it, one that Rooke admirably refers to as an “entrepreneurial

machine.” GSW, with its own successful digital unit, didn’t need Blue Diesel any more than Blue Diesel, which had expanded its therapeutic range and honed its full-service bona fides, needed GSW. Putting the two companies under one roof bolstered existing strengths, rather than patched up strategic and tactical holes.

“[The merger] had nothing to do with cost-cutting or efficiencies,” Rooke says. “It was about bringing a wider variety of talent to the day-to-day path.” The post-merger headaches were confined to what Daley calls “getting from that macro level where it makes strategic sense to the micro level—who sits where, what does the leadership look like. I feel like we navigated [the challenges] quite successfully.”

Joining forces with an agency that’s successful in its own right usually generates so much administrative agita that the newly merged company takes it easy for a while. But just after making it official with Blue Diesel, GSW went to work on another all-encompassing project. Before the year is out, the company will unveil its new branding, complete with new logo, website and all that usually accompanies a self-overhaul.

“We have a desire to lead the market in making human connections,” Daley explains. “We’re not focused on being a managed markets agency or a healthcare agency or embedding digital into everything. Our future is about connecting people together and enabling them to succeed in their healthcare journey.”

The new positioning was birthed in the wake of many conversations about the future of the agency and its business. What GSW leaders hope it reflects is the privilege the company feels to ply its trade in a sector where it can witness the powerful impact of its work.

Asked about the evolution of the rebranding push, Daley refers to Rooke’s comment about challenging the marketplace. “When we brought out the big mirror and looked at who we are and what we’re doing, then looked at the rest of the world and how it’s changing, we came away with more than ‘everything’s going digital,’” he explains. “The decision-making conversations are changing. The people involved in those conversations are changing. So it’s our role to figure out the answers to a bunch of questions: How do you connect those people into the conversations? And to what purpose—when you switch [your mission] from a job of developing advertising to the privilege of having an impact on the world, what does that mean?”

Rooke adds another question to the list: “How do we bring a wider variety of talent to the day-to-day path?” That last one might be the most easily answerable: by hiring really smart people and pairing them in new and exciting ways. Among the A-list hires over the past 12 months were SVP/strategy Kelly Macaulay, SVP/digital Ryan Deshazer, SVP/creative Glenn Batkin and EVP, innovation and product marketing Phil Scott.

Rooke lauds the additions but singles out Scott, owing to the uniqueness of his role: “Just the idea of having a product marketing responsibility here—wow.”

Few agencies consider themselves in the business of product creation. But with GSW’s iQ unit, described by the company in press materials as an “innovation and experimentation lab,” the agency hopes to diversify beyond a given therapeutic or market skill set.

Which isn’t to say that GSW believes the future is in product development and commercialization. “We can

ment for the imminent launch of an anticoagulant. It scored work on the Lilly/ImClone oncology drug ramucirumab. It expanded into the world of animal health with the dairy division of Elanco, Eli Lilly’s animal health division. “We have cows,” Daley deadpans. Organic growth came from Lilly (oncology and diabetes projects), Takeda Pharmaceuticals (for blood pressure drug EDARBI) and Baxter (for cardiac drug Brevibloc and the Floseal hemostatic matrix).

Blue Diesel added work from Endo Pharmaceuti-



AT THE HELM

Joe Daley, president

PERFORMANCE

Merger between “entrepreneurial machine” Blue Diesel and GSW Worldwide results in firm with bolstered digital and business credentials

HIGHLIGHTS

Development of the iQ unit, an “innovation and experimentation lab” will continue to expand the agency’s focus into the product development area

GSW brought in work from Daiichi Sankyo on the launch of an anticoagulant and from Lilly/ImClone on the oncology drug ramucirumab

Blue Diesel nabbed accounts from Endo Pharmaceuticals and grew its relationship with Astellas, scoring interactive AOR status for Vesicare and Myrbetriq

Made several significant additions to executive staff

CHALLENGES

Handling the administrative and hierarchical problems involved in a major transition

Bringing a “wider variety of talent” into play across the board

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 187

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Opposite page: a T-shirt supporting Hurricane Sandy relief; ad for the GetAroundKnee (above)

put both products and services into the marketplace. It’s a new muscle for an advertising agency, basically.” Daley jumps in, half-jokingly, with a caveat: “If we do this well, it moves the business model slightly away from AOR contracts—which are awesome and we want many more of them. But it’s a different model when you’re owning and licensing products.” Promising early projects include iQ Fluent, a platform that helps customize education/treatment plans for patients.

As for AOR contracts, GSW snared its share during the last year (as did Blue Diesel pre-merger). GSW added Daiichi Sankyo to its roster with a global assign-

Are you facing hypertension you consider tough to treat?

An advertisement promoting Takeda Pharmaceuticals’ hypertension medication Edarbyclor

als, both as part of an inVentiv team working on the company’s new testosterone replacement therapy and on its own for bladder cancer drug Valstar and central precocious puberty drug Supprelin. The agency also grew its relationship with Astellas, scoring interactive AOR status for overactive bladder treatments Vesicare and Myrbetriq.

In the months ahead, GSW Fueled by Blue Diesel will be keeping a lot of balls in the air. The hunt for new business will remain a priority, as will the foraging for top employees to service it. On another front, the agency has pushed its internal Amplifier innovation process, through which brand teams are encouraged to develop product and service ideas out to clients. “It’s not just play-acting. It’s a real investment of time and resources. The goal is that our entire organization starts to feed ideas into the system,” says Rooke.

But the new branding appears to be top of mind as the agency heads into summer. “We will continue to focus on mission and on transforming people. We’ll make more and stronger connections and choreograph experiences around brands,” Daley says. “I know this is something you hear frequently, but we are in a very exciting time for our company.” —Larry Dobrow