



AT THE HELM

Roberto Ascione, president

PERFORMANCE

The agency has won “every pitch this year so far”

HIGHLIGHTS

Complementary capabilities between PHI and Razorfish Health led to a combination that “makes everybody stronger”

Headcount at 275, across nine countries

CHALLENGES

Smoothing out the operations and logistical problems that have resulted because of the merger

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

“There’s no one platform that we are not able to deliver against”

—Roberto Ascione

Razorfish Healthware

A “true merger” creates an agency with global reach and deep skills

Roberto Ascione says the August 2012 unification of Publicis Healthware International (PHI) with Razorfish Health has a different storyline from most such events. When one firm swallows another, the principals involved may portray the acquisition as a marriage of equals, but often the two companies involved are noticeably unequal. But Ascione calls the PHI-Razorfish Health union a “true merger,” and that really seems to be the case.

For one thing, both agencies were siblings under the Publicis Healthcare Communications Group banner. In addition, each agency offered a range of healthcare and high-tech services that complemented the other. PHI was strong on the technology side, owning a number of software systems (read: revenue streams from licensing); Razorfish Health boasted know-how in digital media and search. PHI had the global thing down pat; Razorfish Health had the States blanketed.

So Ascione, who leads the renamed Razorfish Healthware as global president, has reason to say that the merger “makes everybody stronger. The new Razorfish Healthware is where the market is going.” Most of the leadership of both companies stuck around post-merger, with former Razorfish Health managing director Katy Thorbahn shifting into the role of global head of agency services. As of mid-May, the combined entity employed around 275 people in nine countries.

The year’s biggest challenges, not surprisingly, were operational and logistical — unifying financial systems, etc. To smooth over some of those headaches, company leaders around the globe meet virtually on a weekly basis. Ascione and his lieutenants have also involved employees at all levels in the integration process.

“At every one of our locations, our people went through training about the new vision, disciplines and

methodologies,” Ascione says. “Whether you meet a Razorfish Healthware person in New York City or Salerno or Madrid, you get a consistent product and consistent output.” To ease the cultural transition, the company launched an enterprise social network.

As for keeping clients happy as it renovated its internal operations, Ascione reports mostly smooth sailing. Razorfish Healthware doesn’t disclose client wins or losses, but Ascione says that the firm has won “every pitch this year so far. All the big things we really wanted to get, we got them.” So what will the new company be able to do that the older ones couldn’t? Geographically, its coverage is about as global as it gets. In terms of client service, few healthcare agencies will be able to match its range of digital offerings. “We have the ability to work with clients across a wider spectrum of services. There’s no one platform that we are not able to deliver against,” Ascione promises.

Of course, with the new scale comes new pressures. Finding the right people to fill open positions is proving vexing, to the extent that Razorfish Healthware

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*Bergenstal RM, Tamborlane WV, Ahmann A, et al. Effectiveness of sensor-augmented insulin-pump therapy in type 1 diabetes. *N Engl J Med.* 2010;363:311–320.

*Battelino T, Congel J, Olsen B, et al. The use and efficacy of continuous glucose monitoring in type 1 diabetes treated with insulin pump therapy: a randomized controlled trial. *Diabetologia.* 2012;55:3155–3162.

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has turned its focus within. “Growing internal talents is the way for us to staff up. I’m not saying we won’t look at the existing talent pool, but it’s clear to me that [the quality] is not there,” Ascione says.

He’s more bullish on the esprit de corps that’s emerging in the wake of the integration. “Both entities came to [this merger] with strong and healthy businesses and cultures,” Ascione adds. “We’re building one that’s bigger and better than the many.” —Larry Dobrow