



**AT THE HELM**

Joe Kuchta, CEO

**PERFORMANCE**

Revenue rose slightly to \$23 million and headcount stayed at about 100

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Formed Sandbox, a new agency network

New AOR assignments from Galena Biopharm, BioMarin, Invictus and Baxter

Won the launch of the Upsher-Smith Galaxy portfolio of antiepileptic treatments

**CHALLENGES**

Pieces of business with Lundbeck, ProStrakan Group and Sandoz went inactive

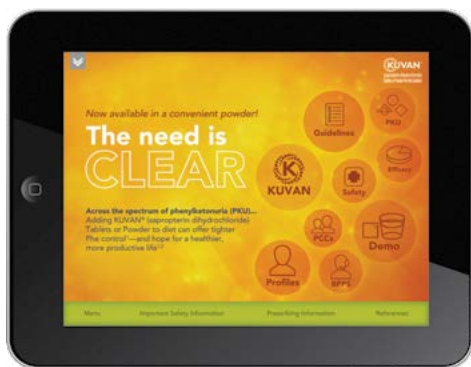
For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 183

**“We want to try building something different that feels right to us”**

—Joe Kuchta

# GA Communication Group

At the center of a new network, agency has a solid, steady year



**G**A Communication Group had a steady year and nice organic growth with existing clients such as Upsher-Smith. The Chicago-headquartered agency also won AOR work from new clients Galena Biopharm and Invictus.

Revenue was up slightly from \$22.9 million to \$23 million and staff stayed pretty even at about 100. Double-digit growth is expected this year.

The big news is CEO Joe Kuchta and COO Mark Goble founded a new agency network called Sandbox with Mark Anthony and John Hilbrich last December. Kuchta says Sandbox did not buy GA, though some investment websites reported it was an acquisition.

“It’s a different model,” he explains. “We expect to have at least two additional agencies join Sandbox this year—not startups, but agencies with long, proven track records and strong client relationships. We’re going to find complementary businesses that aren’t necessarily healthcare agencies. Sandbox is an agency network, not a healthcare agency network, but it will have a strong healthcare pillar.” Kuchta, Goble, Anthony and Hilbrich are all partners in Sandbox.

“We’re pooling our resources,” he says. “It’s a really good strategic move for us because we don’t want to

get swallowed up. We’ve had [buyout] offers, but that doesn’t interest us. We want to try something different that feels right to us, and if we can build a network that remotely reflects what we’ve built at GA, it’ll be great. We want to give independent agencies a fighting chance to compete for business.”

Nancy Finigan, with GA since 1998, was named president this January. Kuchta says her promotion gives him and Goble more time to build Sandbox. Barclay Missen, who rejoined the agency in 2011 as creative director/UX, was named VP, CCO, overseeing creative and content development on all fronts. Steve Buecking was promoted to VP, executive producer.

All of the agency’s new wins last year were AOR assignments. They included Galena Biopharm’s breakthrough cancer pain medication Abstral, the launch of BioMarin’s KUVAN powder (PKU) and an early-stage innovative device from Invictus to protect fragile neonates. Baxter awarded AOR work on a global patient platform and AOR work on aspects of and programs around the US launch of a specialized therapy for immunodeficiency. GA also won the launch of the Upsher-Smith Galaxy (antiepileptic treatments).

Various pieces of business with Lundbeck, ProStrakan Group and Sandoz went inactive.



**An iPad piece for BioMarin’s KUVAN (left) and work for Upsher-Smith Galaxy (above)**

Kuchta is very positive about the Sandbox deal, noting that it set the course for GA for the next 20 years. “I think GA will benefit greatly from having other agencies in the Sandbox,” he adds. “Say we bring in a PR agency or an analytics agency—it will have a sweeping effect across all of our clients. Even though we already do analytics in house, each agency will benefit from each other.” —Tanya Lewis