



AT THE HELM

Michael McLinden, partner, chief strategy officer

PERFORMANCE

Revenue dipped from \$6.4 million in 2012 to \$6.2 million in 2013

HIGHLIGHTS

Won AOR status for pre-market strategy work on Upsher-Smith's CNS franchise

Maintained agency's focus on strategy

Signed deal for agency to be acquired by consumer shop Connelly Partners

CHALLENGES

Loss of AOR work for two indications on UCB's Neupro

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

Mc|K Healthcare

Change is a constant across the board for this Boston-based firm



Major changes were afoot last year at Boston-based Mc|K Healthcare. Partner and chief strategy officer Michael McLinden says the agency resigned its two biggest accounts last summer—US AOR assignments on two indications on UCB's Neupro (Parkinson's disease and restless leg syndrome)—and shed more than half its staff.

"We pretty much totally rethought the way we're doing what we're doing," McLinden explains. "We wanted to focus on our sweet spot—marketing analytics, lifecycle planning and messaging strategy. I liked being a smaller, hungry shop, and I wanted to be a smaller, hungry shop again. We don't want to simply cash checks and keep programs going. We want to challenge ourselves and recognize that it's getting harder and harder to sell pharma products, and we have to be very smart about it."

Revenue actually wasn't down all that much in 2013—it took a slight dip from \$6.4 million in 2012 to \$6.2 million.

Staff was down from 26 ending 2012 to 10 this year.

In May 2014, McLinden inked a deal to sell the agency to Boston consumer shop Connelly Partners. He doesn't know what his new title will be, which

he says signals openness to figuring out what works. About four of the 10 remaining Mc|K employees are expected to make the move. The rest will be either let go or will have found other jobs.

"[Connelly Partners founder] Steve Connelly wants to invest in a vigorous, broad, integrated health communications platform," McLinden says. "We'll bring our pharma accounts, and Connelly Partners has some healthcare clients. The goal is to build a broader healthcare vision."

Mc|K did win one piece of business last year—AOR status for pre-market strategy work on Upsher-Smith's CNS franchise.

Strategy is obviously a focus for McLinden.

"We were competing against people for whom the channel was the strategy," he says of Mc|K. "It was hard to put that in perspective so our clients could see what was adding value and what was the latest shiny object."

While most pharma companies need to improve the effectiveness of their sales forces, McLinden doesn't want to recommend that clients do anything just because everyone else in the industry is doing it. He says that one unnamed Mc|K client switched from digital sales aids back to paper and leave-behind pieces in 2013 and reps loved it.

"If you have an iPad development group to feed, you find yourself saying, 'We should be selling iPad work,'" McLinden explains. "[The question is] are we doing it because we want to sell iPad work or because it's the right thing to do?"



Both digital work (far left) and print pieces like this ad for Upsher-Smith's Divigel (near left) were on Mc|K Healthcare's plate in 2013

McLinden thinks the answers in terms of what works in healthcare marketing will be different in 2017 than they are today.

"Medium-size pharma companies are marching uphill into the wind on ice trying to build their brands and create value," he says. "[We want to] reshape the value proposition and help them prove the full value of what they do."

"Consumer companies, like yogurt brands and health spas, are looking for scientific credibility. Pharma brands need to target the right consumer with the right materials in the right place. Connelly Partners has expertise in coming at it from the consumer side. We have expertise in coming at it from the science side. That intersection [will serve clients well]."

—Tanya Lewis

"We want to reshape the value proposition"

—Michael McLinden