



AT THE HELM

Michael Parisi, president

PERFORMANCE

Revenue up by 30% in 2006

HIGHLIGHTS

Staff more than doubled from 29 to 70

Completed first global launch: Bristol-Myers Squibb's Sprycel

Won two AstraZeneca oncology products in prelaunch

CHALLENGE

Rebuilding the reputation of the pharmaceutical industry

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—Michael Parisi



Altum

Two-year-old specialty shop boosted by significant growth in global work

Launched in 2005, Altum’s staff more than doubled last year (from 29 to 70) as revenue skyrocketed by 30%. “There was a lot of stretching,” says president Michael Parisi.

Part of the CommonHealth network, Altum is a specialty shop with market focus on HIV, oncology, biologics and higher-tech products. Staffing has been a challenge, and the agency has made a significant investment by growing its own talent. “We’re not of the mindset to raid other companies,” Parisi says. “We’ve done a great job of training and have recruited from within CommonHealth. It’s a great advantage.”

Parisi has made successful pulls from academia. A scientific communications department was created, which is staffed by two PhDs, a PharmD, and an advanced oncology nurse practitioner. “We need people who can translate and understand big ideas, scientific ideas,” he says.

Managing growth and making hires were the biggest challenges for Altum last year. The highlight for Parisi was “the ability to hire to the needs of our business and maintain the heart and soul of the organization.”

Altum experienced global growth, and no accounts were lost. The agency’s first global launch was Bristol-Myers Squibb’s cancer product Sprycel. It launched Procrit and Doxil for founding client Ortho Biotech and will help launch oncology treatment Velcade outside the US. Other wins include two AstraZeneca oncology products in prelaunch; another prelaunch oncology product from biotech Ariad; Bayer’s Campath (for

leukemia); and Eisai’s breast cancer treatment e7389.

Parisi sees globalization of brand communication as an expanding trend. “More and more companies are starting to think globally. Gone are the days in marketing and advertising when you would say, ‘In the US we do this.’ All barriers between local markets are gone. Technology has changed the way we look at brands.”

Parisi thinks focus on segmentation is all well and good—as long as it doesn’t blur the big picture. “More clients are doing more and more and more analysis to understand and segment customers,” he says. “I get the sense people are losing the spirit, heart and soul of what makes for great healthcare advertising. Understanding segments is great, but understanding how you behave toward those segments is more important. We’ve done so much analysis we’ve gotten away from the behavior side. We drive physician behavior. We drive them to prescribe our medications.”

The industry is certainly “taking a beating in the press,” and Parisi thinks it’s time to step up to the plate.

“Cost of drugs is the platform now,” he says. “When our clients post profits, [the story is] they’re draining the public. That has to swing back. Pharma companies are in the business of making money—it’s how you do it that [casts you] as a good partner or bad partner.”



Above: Professional ad for Ortho Biotech’s anemia treatment Procrit

Parisi feel the industry needs to band together. “Pharmaceutical and biotech [companies] need to step up now more ever,” he says. “Clear recognition of the problem is the first step. It’s time to take action. It’s an industry PR problem. Who’s going to step up?”

“I feel for a lot of my clients,” he continues. “We’re one step worse [because] we’re the ones that promote [them]. We’re not [held] in high regard [by] the general public right now, either.”

Altum currently has five global brands (three are yet to be launched). “Specialty markets tend to move very quickly,” he says. “We’re constantly innovating our processes and services. Part of our charge is to bring at least two new services to clients every year.”

—Tanya Lewis