



AT THE HELM

John Nosta, president

HIGHLIGHTS

Wins included: Genentech's Nutropin and Pulmozyme; Abbott; Sirion Therapeutics; global work for Merck's Janumet; and Merck Disease Management Education

Bringing in John Dietz as creative director

CHALLENGES

Talent is a "chronic problem"

Lost Betaseron and US work for Januvia

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"Pharma advertising is boring. Period. Exclamation mark. Certainly not question mark."

—John Nosta

Noesis

On a crusade to break the mould of industry stagnation and boring ads



Last year was John Nosta's first year as president of Noesis, a CommonHealth agency. He came up through creative and has a background in physics and cardiology, thus bringing "eclectic strengths" and recruiting "eclectic talent." He aims to transform.

"It's time someone steps up and takes the mantle of superior thinking and superior creative execution," Nosta says. "Pharma advertising is boring. Period. Exclamation mark. Certainly not question mark. We're steeped in regulatory constraints. We [must] communicate science responsibly. We also have the luxury of changing lives—of saving lives. Yet we fail categorically to drive this emotional aspect and end up with anemic advertising of patients smiling at the camera. We have the ability to truly change lives, yet our advertising tends to be more apologetic than jubilant."

Last year was about "codifying philosophy" and establishing what Noesis means.

"We believe in the magic of advertising," he says. "Noesis means 'to think' from ancient Greek. Our thinking is a combination of the brilliance and insight of someone like Robert Oppenheimer with the cognitive dissonance of Groucho Marks. We're different by design. In a broad sense, we're not a science-based ad agency. The science we believe in is the science of advertising. Many agencies have information paralysis, get

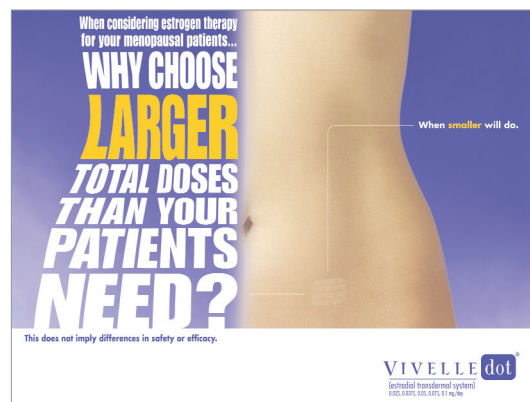
lost in details, and often become an extension of a pharma company. We want to add something the pharma company doesn't have—creativity. Information is nothing until it's filtered through a mind tuned to a creative frequency. Pharma companies are a repository of information. Ad agencies are a repository of creativity. Together they create critical mass."

Wins included Genentech brands Nutropin and Pulmozyme; a yet-to-be-launched pain drug from Abbott Laboratories; Sirion Therapeutics; Janumet (global) for Merck; and Merck Disease Management Education. Noesis lost Berlex's Betaseron and US business for Merck's Januvia (it retained global business).

Among last year's highlights was bringing into the fold creative director John Dietz (from Cline Davis & Mann). Talent is a "chronic problem," for which Nosta believes agencies are partly responsible.

"Look at the people doing interviews—it isn't hard to figure out why [recruiting is difficult]," he says. "They're boring. Why [do] brilliant people shun the pharma ad industry as if it is itself infective? The industry has inertia that drives it toward stagnation. We seek to break that mold."

Nosta thinks industry leaders must stand up to public criticism. "We [need] honest fair debate about issues and not hide behind overly simplistic slogans like 'with you for life' or 'working for patients,'" he says. "These empty slogans try to position pharma companies as benevolent or benign. [We need] robust discussion



Above: Journal ad for Novogyne's Vivelle Dot
Top left: From a journal ad for Berlex's Magnevist

about the value of medical innovation and [to link] that value with profit. We should not run."

Noesis is on target to increase organic growth and expand client base. "We're not your father's ad agency," Nosta says. "To be more contemporary and progressive and understand marketplace dynamics, which are different, [you must] create an environment where thought and enthusiasm flourish. I want people to want to come to work. I want clients to see a true differentiated agency." —Tanya Lewis