



AT THE HELM

Carleen Kelly, president

PERFORMANCE

2009 "shaping up well"

HIGHLIGHTS

Landed two pieces of business from Forest and a global assignment from Merck/Schering-Plough

Working on a new compound in a "blockbuster" category

Made two new hires

Working with pharma-side procurement officers and ad services groups

CHALLENGE

Continuing to establish the agency on Medicine Avenue

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 175

"You can understand why clients need a longer process; brands are so important to their future"

—Carleen Kelly

Surge Worldwide Healthcare Communications

High-energy pitch activity, new account wins jolt Corbett Accel unit

Judging by new-business activity, 2009 appears to be shaping up well for Surge Worldwide Healthcare Communications.

"In terms of opportunities, I am optimistic about this year," says Carleen Kelly, president. "We have recently participated in three pitches for large assignments. Our name is getting out into the marketplace, and this has given us opportunities."

The agency, part of Corbett Accel Healthcare Group, certainly closed on some big accounts last year. Her firm won two pieces of business, an IV anti-infective agent from new client Forest Pharmaceuticals and a global assignment for a forthcoming hypercholesterolemia product from the Merck/Schering-Plough joint venture. On both assignments, Surge is the professional AOR.

More recently, Surge has also landed a new assignment for a compound in the megablockbuster sleep category and is working on branding the science, message platforms and lexicon development. She reports no account losses.

The hunt is not getting any easier. An RFI generally consists of one, two or three phases followed by an in-person pitch to the marketing team, after which additional questions may need to be fielded. Kelly takes it in stride: "You can understand why clients need a longer process; brands are so important to their future, so getting the right agency is important. We support the time they need."

It helps that Surge's account infrastructure is buttressed by some sizable brands: professional work for Schering-Plough's Nasonex blockbuster allergy

spray, along with Schering-Plough corporate, plus professional and managed care duties for Vytorin/Inegy and Zetia/Ezetrol, and the rest of the hypercholesterolemia franchise of Merck/Schering-Plough. Daiichi Sankyo and Merck's vaccines division round out the roster.

High-profile client work, combined with the number and quality of recent pitches, have generated a lot of employee enthusiasm. And while Surge is still a relatively new name on Medicine Avenue, the word has leaked out.

"It used to be that we really had to do a lot of work to meet top talent," she says. "Now, we're having a lot more come to the website, send a resume. They've heard more about [us]." Two people were hired this past year (Kelly declines to name them), and four staffers have expressed interest in a return.

At the same time, Kelly says, pitches are getting longer, and brands are asking for greater integration and efficiency from their marketing partners.

This agency is responding. Its redesigned 48,000-square-foot workspace at 220 E. 42nd St. houses Surge, as well as sister e-marketing agency Kinect's NYC office and med ed group Accel Health. The three coordinate closely on accounts to offer comprehensive services and share best practices. Other units from parent company Omnicom are brought in as needed.

"It's almost like walking from 42nd to 43rd street,"



Ad introducing Merck's Isentress, the first drug in a class of HIV medications called integrase inhibitors

says Kelly of the ease with which colleagues can collaborate in their new habitat. "This fosters an environment where strong culture and team synergies naturally unfold."

To drive further efficiencies, Surge works with pharma-side procurement officers and ad services groups to hone responsibilities. Scope of work can take a while to nail down; efficiencies make it worthwhile. "We look at best practices and say [to procurement], 'We hear you. We definitely understand in this particular area where you want to look at either decreasing hours or costs or shifting hours [from one brand or project to another].'"

Five years ago, the agency established a Six-Sigma process to enhance quality. Says Kelly: "Now we've looked at it to say, 'How can we make workflow process efficient by taking steps out?'" —Marc Iskowitz