

Allard•Johnson Communications & the Canadian Pharma Industry: A Lasting Love Affair



From left to right: Terry Johnson, President; Pierre St-Amand, Director, Client Services (Montreal); Mark McElwain, Vice-President, Client Services (Toronto); and Mario Daigle, Executive Vice-President.

Please give us a brief overview of your background in the health-care field, up to and including your current position as Partner & Executive Vice-President at Allard•Johnson.

I met Terry Johnson at Burroughs Wellcome in the mid-80s. He was an account director and I was a product manager and we saw eye to eye on a lot of things. When we hooked up again in 1993, Terry was running LBJ Advertising. He told me he wanted to open up a health-care agency in Montreal and I said, "Looking for someone to run it?"

Today, Terry is President and CEO of Allard•Johnson and I head the agency's Montreal operation.

Please review what led to the creation of Allard•Johnson in late 1999? Do you see further mergers involving your agency in the future?

Wellness communications was our focus from the start. In 1999, we merged with Allard & Associates to create Allard•Johnson. This allowed us to offer a wider range of services and also expand our Montreal office. Merging was the perfect strategic solution for building a national agency with strong roots in both Toronto and Montreal.

Now we can leverage key crossover learnings from other client sectors to help our wellness clients—in direct marketing, for example. We won gold this fall at the 2004 Canadian Marketing Association Awards in the Pharmaceutical Healthcare Personal Care Products and Services category for our client, Aventis, and their new antibiotic, Ketek®.

So as far as new mergers go, it's simply looking for the right opportunity at the right time.

Talking with
Mario Daigle,
Partner &
Executive
Vice-President,
Allard•Johnson
Communications



For Ketek® (Sanofi-Aventis): CMA/RSVP AWARD (Gold) Direct Mail campaign—Pharmaceutical/Healthcare/Personal Care/ Products and Services category (2004).

What challenges does your agency face in today's market?

Client budgets and internal resources are shrinking and this puts a lot of pressure on all agencies. I think this is our number one challenge. Fortunately, we can rely on 120 experienced people who can absorb the extra workload and deliver on time and on budget.

Cynicism is another issue. Pharma is getting far too much negative media

and we're going to have to be even more careful—if that's possible—about the way we market our products. By the same token, to succeed we'll have to keep pushing the envelope, responsibly. This delicate balance can only be achieved by experienced people.

Also many global pharma firms are under pressure to align their Canadian offices with international agencies and rerun global campaigns. But the reality is that more than ever, our clients need agencies familiar with their domestic wellness markets.

What differentiates Allard•Johnson from other agencies?

Experience and creativity are the price of entry in this industry today. Allard•Johnson's culture is driven to develop innovative solutions proactively, which means our entire staff is thinking ahead for solutions to challenges that aren't even blips on the marketing radar screen yet, but may be headed our clients' way.

Our senior management is made up of people like Mark McElwain, a former PAAB commissioner, and Pierre St-Amand, who provides us with outstanding leadership from our Montreal office. This helps.

The stability and loyalty of our clients helps too. They help us attract—and keep—the best and brightest industry talent, who in turn, help win recognition by producing award-winning creative. It's part of our culture to go that extra mile. Does this make a difference? I guess you'll have to ask our clients.

What is the key to successful client relationships?

Successful relationships depend on expertise, people and the ingenuity that goes into your creative. Then there's trust, honesty, energy and passion. And you top it all off with something you do differently than everybody else. In our case, it's the fact we're proactive for all our clients.

Our clients are loyal and very stable. This is another thing that differentiates us. We win pitches, but we also get new assignments from existing clients every year—often without pitching. I'm particularly proud of the fact that two of our clients have been with us for more than 20 years and our relationship with our largest client is now in its 31st year! Establishing and maintaining strong, productive relationships has always been key for us.

In our business you have to question yourself—always question yourself. It's the only way you can continue to offer clients fresh, innovative ideas. You have to keep asking questions until you're sure you have the best creative, the best strategy, the best possible media—in short, that you've got the best advertising there is.

People say we deliver and we focus on the future. But it's mostly about being able to put ourselves in our client's shoes, working non-stop and never losing enthusiasm for what we do. It all starts with listening and understanding.

What wellness accounts are you currently working on?

Currently, we have major ethical brands from Abbott, Berlex, Merck Frosst, Novartis, Purdue Pharma, Sanofi-Aventis, Shire BioChem and Stiefel. We have hospital and diagnostic products from Hospira and Roche Lab Networks.

In OTC, we have ConvaTec and Church & Dwight, which includes brands like Graval®, Trojan and Rub A535®. And we have Otto Bock, the world's leading prosthetic devices company.

In nutrition, we have the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency and Dairy Farmers of Canada. Professional associations include Rx&D, SOGC and OLTC, plus the Canadian AIDS Society and a number of hospital foundations.

In the other segments, we work with Algorithm Pharma and biotech companies like Biogen, BioSintech and Prometic. As I say, we're experts in wellness and it shows.



For Clave® (Abbott HPD [now Hospira]): The Clave product management team won the international Wendler Award for Marketing due to Clave's "Keeping You Safe" campaign and promotions such as this one, which helped achieve significant sales growth over the previous year.



For Hydromorph Contin® (Purdue Pharma): Using an empathetic message that appeals to doctors working with patients suffering from severe cancer pain, this campaign for a long-acting opioid has helped the brand achieve its double-digit growth. Award of Merit at Rx Club Awards in New York City (2004).

What is your opinion of global branding and assigning global brands to a single global ad agency (communications company)?

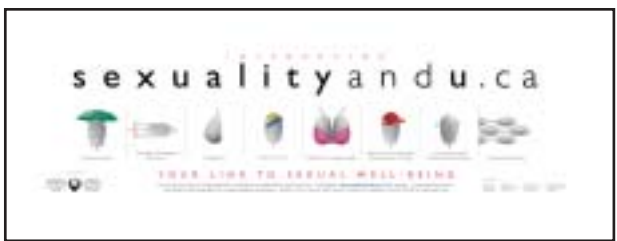
Allard•Johnson has had great success adapting global campaigns to work here in Canada. However, some may insist on going global with a positioning and a campaign that simply can't work under local market conditions, culture or dynamics. If these things are ignored, globalizing won't work.

I think it's possible, though, to go with global branding—a certain look and feel, or a brand wordmark. But at least give the domestic marketers and their agencies the freedom to develop strategies and tactics that are tuned to domestic market needs.

At Allard•Johnson, as a partner-owned Canadian company that is also part of a global communications group, we can look at this issue fairly objectively. For some clients, it's like a forced marriage. They're obliged to work with agencies they weren't even considering simply because local resources couldn't match those of Paris or New York. Will the Canadian office of a global agency have the guts to stand up when the time comes and tell global that their campaign just won't work here? Maybe, but not likely.

What changes, if any, do you anticipate over the next two to five years with respect to the way pharma companies communicate with physicians, pharmacists and patients?

Direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs is still not permitted in Canada, but we've all seen it's possible to push the envelope. In the meantime, most of our marketing activity will continue to focus on health-care professionals as gatekeepers.



For SOGC, www.sexualityandu.ca won the Best Of Class Award in Health Care at the International Web Page Awards and a Certificate of Merit at the CMA/RSVP Awards (2002) for Interactive campaigns under \$1 million.

Industry codes are putting more and more barriers between representatives and the doctor—maybe too many. Communications will become more customized, using relationship marketing, e-mail and Web, combined with office visits and direct marketing prompts.

The influence of other health-care professionals and payers will likely grow, so agencies will need to be staffed with highly skilled professionals to help their customers firm up their positions and gain market share.

As an industry, we should be proud of our accomplishments and our products. They cure diseases, save lives and reduce pain. They save costs to our overall health-care system. We have to educate consumers about the value and the benefits of the products we develop and market, otherwise, it will always be a price issue and we'll be at the mercy of price controls. Is this what we want?

As I said, we must always be asking ourselves questions. CPM

Discover the Strength within.

Building People, Process, Products

- Trade Relations
- Commercialization
- Marketing Strategies
- New Business Development
- Direct to Audience Communications
- Sales Force Planning & Analysis
- Servicing Biotech, Pharmaceutical,
- OTC and Consumer Brands



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