

THE **ROAD** STARTS HERE.

After 25 years of rolling down the creative highway, **Chris Snell** still gets a charge out of exploring new and out-of-the-box marketing solutions for his agency and his clients.

Many dream of forming their own business, one that would blossom into a highly successful company without losing sight of its vivacity. Chris Snell — president of creative services at inChord Communications Inc., and a founding partner of Gerbig, Snell/Weisheimer & Associates, now a division of inChord — is one of those rare individuals who can revel in realizing that dream.

From the start, Mr. Snell and his original business partners, Bob Gerbig and Rick Weisheimer, sought to be an independent voice, to have control over their destiny. Their goal was to create an agency that was productive and professional in its approach, but also a fun place to work. “When my partners and I founded GSW 25 years ago, we created a unique culture that is friendly and pretty laid back, and yet very results oriented,” Mr. Snell says.

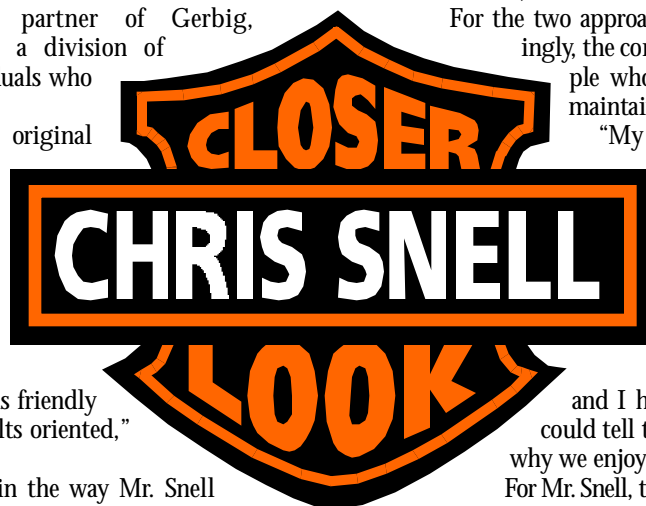
The laid-back attitude is apparent in the way Mr. Snell conducts his life, both inside and outside the office, from riding a Harley-Davidson motorcycle in his free time, to sharing his office with Cleo, a four-month-old Jack Russell puppy, which is named for the advertising awards.

The results-oriented approach is just as clear. GSW, located in Columbus, Ohio, is the largest independent communications organization in the healthcare arena, and boasts a long list of highly prestigious clients.

For the two approaches to come together effectively and lastingly, the company needed a defined goal, as well as people who could work together as a team, and yet maintain their own space and mission.

“My two original partners and I had worked together in the past, and one of the things that was appealing was our unique chemistry,” Mr. Snell says. “We knew enough about each other’s roles to cover for each other if necessary, and yet we all had distinctly different talents. One of the partners had a public relations background, one had account experience, and I had the creative background. So none of us could tell the others what to do, and ultimately that is why we enjoyed such longevity in the relationship.”

For Mr. Snell, the attraction to healthcare was the importance of the industry’s products and services in improving and saving lives. “When my partners and I first went into business, we delved into a number of different areas — some consumer work, some business-to-business, and some healthcare, mostly hospital and a medical associa-



IT **NEVER** ENDS.



tion,” Mr. Snell says. “One of the things that was attractive to us was the ability to work on products and services that make a difference in people’s lives. The healthcare industry offers something that an agency can get its teeth into, that the individual can believe in, and have passion about. That was a big appeal for us.”

To Mr. Snell, another appealing aspect is the diverse opportunities to be creative.

“Work in the healthcare industry, from a creative standpoint, doesn’t all have to be science and pharmacology,” he says. “We have opportunities and abilities to offer creative solutions in a very wide variety of venues — print, broadcast, exhibits, interactive. It’s a very challenging and diverse arena.”

Chris Snell’s aim is to nurture the culture that he has helped develop at the agency.

THE BIG BREAK

Every successful business has that defining moment or opportunity when the hard work, pitches, and ideas pan out and bring in that big account. For GSW, Mr. Snell says, that standout client was Abbott Laboratories.

“Abbott really gave us our significant

start,” Mr. Snell says. “Bob Gerbig got us an invitation to go to the Abbott hospital products division and we presented them with some ideas on how to promote a particular line of pharmaceuticals. We put a lot into that pitch, gained a lot of attention with our ideas, and ultimately did quite a bit of work with the hospital products division and also with the corporate division of Abbott. That deal helped us to attract the attention of other pharmaceutical companies.”

Among those other pharmaceutical clients were two prominent and exciting creative opportunities.

“From a creative point of view, being involved with the launch of Rhinocort (AstraZeneca’s allergy medication) was exciting and rewarding,” Mr. Snell says. “Rhinocort was coming into a very crowded allergy marketplace, but we helped them launch with a unique message. It moved AstraZeneca quickly into a leadership position in the category.”

Another coup for the agency was winning the Eli Lilly and Co. business in 1997. “I equated winning the Lilly business to a David taking on some pretty big Goliaths,” Mr. Snell says. “As our relationship with Lilly evolved, the agency began to take on more and more business, and that was very rewarding. It put us on the map.”

Part of the agency’s appeal to clients, Mr. Snell maintains, is its agility. “We are an independent voice, and that’s very rare right now in the marketplace. We have the opportunity to do things quickly, without having to go through several layers of approval.”

A DEPARTMENT OF ONE

When GSW began its operations, the creative department was a department of one — Mr. Snell. “From the get go I was the creative department, so initially I wore a lot of hats,” he recalls. “As we added business, my role expanded. I continued to work on creative assignments, but I also began to seek out and recruit talent, to put processes in place to ensure that work was done correctly, and at the quality level we wanted.”

From the start, Mr. Snell has striven to foster an environment that engenders creativity, and encourages out-of-the-box thinking — from the décor of the office, to the creative staff he hires. In addition to an eclectic collection of artwork decorating the walls at inChord, the creative staff enjoy an almost

Blazing a trail

CHRIS SNELL - RESUME

JULY 2001. President of creative services at inChord Communications Inc. In 2001, The Gerbig, Snell/Weisheimer family of companies announced its new identity: inChord, enabling the organization to establish greater awareness of its broad spectrum of capabilities and its demonstrated ability to deliver those services seamlessly across company lines. With capitalized billings of \$630 million in 2001, inChord is one of the largest independent communications organizations in the world. Mr. Snell is responsible for the recruitment of the creative, traffic, and production areas. The creative and production departments of GSW comprise more than 140 talented individuals, each with a unique background of experience.

PRESENT TO 1987. In charge of creative services at GSW, which in 1987 became focused on pharmaceutical accounts, picking up eight products from the Hospital Products Division of Abbott Laboratories, Vi-Daylin Vitamins and Ensure from Ross Labs, and Toprol-XL from Astra. Additional assignments from these clients have included Pulmicort and Pulmicort Respules, Rhinocort, and Rhinocort Aqua.

1977. Together with Bob Gerbig and Rick Weisheimer, Mr. Snell purchased the assets of William Konold & Associates and opened the doors of Gerbig, Snell/Weisheimer & Associates with a staff of six, retaining the Konold clients as a part of the transaction.

1975. Joined forces with Bob Gerbig and Rick Weisheimer at William S. Konold & Associates, an advertising and public-relations firm. Primary accounts included: Doctors Hospitals and the Ohio Osteopathic Association. The agency won the assignment for all the promotional efforts for Muirfield Village, the Muirfield Village Golf Club, a major development, and the Memorial tournament (part of the PGA tour) designed and underwritten by Columbus native Jack Nicklaus.

1974. Moved to Swisher et al, a regional agency and was creative director for a variety of consumer and business-to-business accounts.

1972. Joined J.W. Tolley and Associates as an art director. JWT was an advertising agency owned by Columbia Broadcasting, which specialized in national advertising for development and real-estate accounts. Clients of note included the launch of Red Roof Inns, a national lodging chain, The Klingbeil Company, and Ohio National Bank.

EDUCATION: 1972 TO 1968. Four years of intensive study in art and advertising design at the Columbus College of Art and Design. During art school studies, interned at Bayer and Co. as a full-service printer in the art department learning production skills and designing for a variety clients for the company.

1972. Awarded a bachelor of fine arts degree from Columbus College of Art and Design

1968 TO 1966. Studied business administration and art at Ohio State University

home-like environment where they can mull ideas and contemplate strategies.

When it comes to recruiting staff, Mr. Snell looks for talent from many different arenas. "I don't necessarily try to seek individuals who have a significant pharmaceutical background for creative positions," he says. "I may want someone who has worked on consumer brands, who can look at a project from the point of view of the consumer. I believe that whoever a product is aimed at — be it a physician, a nurse, a pharmacist — there are ways to communicate with them that will gain their attention."

To encourage innovative thinking, Mr. Snell tries to employ a hands-off approach. "The main thing I tell people, is I do not hover," Mr. Snell says. "I let people do what they do best without looking over their shoulder. I'm not going to dictate what they do. If someone has something they need to talk about, or an idea to run by me, my door is open."

THE "BILLION-DOLLAR" QUESTION

As the industry becomes more and more competitive, the onus is on healthcare agencies to offer ideas and solutions to their clients that are innovative and tackle the problems their pharmaceutical clients face.

"Agencies can no longer just offer traditional solutions," Mr. Snell says. "It is crucial to look across the entire communication channel for innovative ways to deliver the message."

For Chris Snell, the attraction to the healthcare pharmaceutical industry's products and

A journal ad, a sales aid, or direct mail, may not necessarily fit anymore as the main way to communicate."

Of equal import is understanding the client's audience. "An agency that doesn't listen is going down the wrong path, which will frustrate the client and undermine the client-agency relationship," he says.

"We have found it very helpful to build a partnership credo going into the relationship with a client," Mr. Snell says. "Once an agreement has been reached, the next step is to put what was agreed upon into practice, then go through regular evaluations where the client grades us and we grade the client. We have found that honest exchange ultimately builds a great working relationship. We have that with every client of record today."

Regardless of how creative an agency's ideas and solutions are, nothing will move forward unless the client is willing to embrace change. "We're starting to see our clients increasingly willing to take risks creatively," he says. "One example is the work we had done for Prozac, where we used icons to communicate the message."

Another example Mr. Snell offers is the

work he and the agency did for Rhinocort. "Presenting an image of a rhinoceros and a butterfly was probably a little risky at the time, especially for a brand that was going into a crowded market. But ultimately that willingness on the part of the client to take a risk has paid off with some excellent results."

For agencies to maintain their success, they need to be innovative, and in that way they are no different from their clients. "The healthcare industry has to deliver out-of-the-box products and services to the marketplace, and it's much the same for us in that we need to deliver out-of-the-box marketing solutions," he says.

LESSONS IN CREATIVITY

In addition to his many roles at GSW and inChord, Mr. Snell is a member of the faculty at the Columbus College of Art and Design, where he teaches graduating seniors conceptual design for about six to eight weeks a semester.

Hardly surprisingly, Mr. Snell's experience in the agency world rubs off on his academic role. "I try to bring the real world into teaching, and some of my assignments sometimes are healthcare based," Mr. Snell comments.

Navigating a long and winding road

IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH PHARMAVOICE, CHRIS SNELL, PRESIDENT OF CREATIVE SERVICES

AT INCHORD COMMUNICATIONS INC. TALKS ABOUT THE CREATIVE CHALLENGES THE INDUSTRY FACES.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO HEALTHCARE AGENCIES FACE IN AN EVOLVING INDUSTRY?

One is regulations, and this may be regulation by the FDA, or self regulation. I'm not sure that we have seen all the adjustments that will be made in direct-to-consumer advertising, or how physicians can be promoted to. Another challenge for any agency in the healthcare industry is how nimble they can be, how quickly they can adjust not only to the marketplace, but also to the needs of the clients. For us, being independent gives us a great deal of agility. The other challenge with any agency is having the ability to offer global solutions. Agencies can't think just U.S., they have to be able to think on a global basis.

WHAT UNIQUE SOLUTIONS DOES INCHORD OFFER ITS HEALTHCARE CLIENTS?

Within inChord we have a number of different areas and companies that we can work with. Blue Diesel, the interactive company, is an example. Blue Diesel can offer sales training via the Internet, and they

can also tie in with SG Madison, which is our medical education company. Even five years ago that didn't exist, and a pharmaceutical company would have to constantly send new materials out via more traditional methods of communication to its salesforce. Now we can have changes made to a communication process in a day and deliver that via the Internet, and also deliver it via secure, encrypted sites. Another example is the newly formed Y Brand Outlook, a New York City-based group that opened in early 2002 to provide strategic consulting and branding services. The six specialty communication companies under the inChord umbrella, each maintaining their individual brand and identity, include Gerbig, Snell/Weisheimer — a full-service advertising and PR agency based in Columbus, Ohio, serving both North America and Europe; Blue Diesel — an interactive and Web development agency based in Columbus, Ohio; Creative Healthcare Solutions (CHS) — a product management outsourcing firm based in Scottsdale, Ariz.; Palio Communications — a full-service advertising agency based in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.; S.G. Madison — a medical education and communication firm based in Irving, Texas; and Health Process Management (HPM) — a data analytics and manage-

Healthcare arena was the importance of the services in improving and saving lives.

"My goal with the students is to present them with projects that will force them to think, to search a little deeper into their creative soul — I really feel I've had some pretty good success."

As with any relationship there is some give and take, and for Mr. Snell and GSW the take has been in the discovery of talent. "I've found some exceptionally talented people at the school, and we've brought them under our roof," Mr. Snell says. "We have a pretty diverse creative offering at inChord, partially as a result of my involvement at the college."

Part of the attraction to teaching at the college is that it is Mr. Snell's alma mater, and the professional home of one of the people who has had a huge influence on his creative life.

"Probably one of the most inspirational people in my life, and I didn't really realize it

until I had graduated, was the dean of the school at the time, Joseph Canzani," Mr. Snell says. "He taught color concepts, but more importantly his vision for the school and the training he offered was to focus on the fundamentals — learn how to draw, understand color, and understand how to develop creative ideas. No matter how a student applied those fundamentals when they left school, those foundations held true. I didn't realize how much that meant until I got out of college."

Creativity goes beyond an ability to draw, or write, Mr. Snell says. "It's about a vision, and in that way I have been inspired by many of the people I work with. I am very inspired by our CEO and chairman Blane Walter. His ideas and thinking mesh very well with where the industry will go in the future."

A GOOD BALANCE

While Mr. Gerbig and Mr. Weisheimer have both retired, Mr. Snell continues to be motivated and excited by the creative opportunities that GSW and inChord offer.

But he also has learned to balance his work life with recreation. "I try to leave the office at the office," he says.

That leaves time for other pursuits — some

summer boating, plenty of reading, and riding his Harley-Davidson.

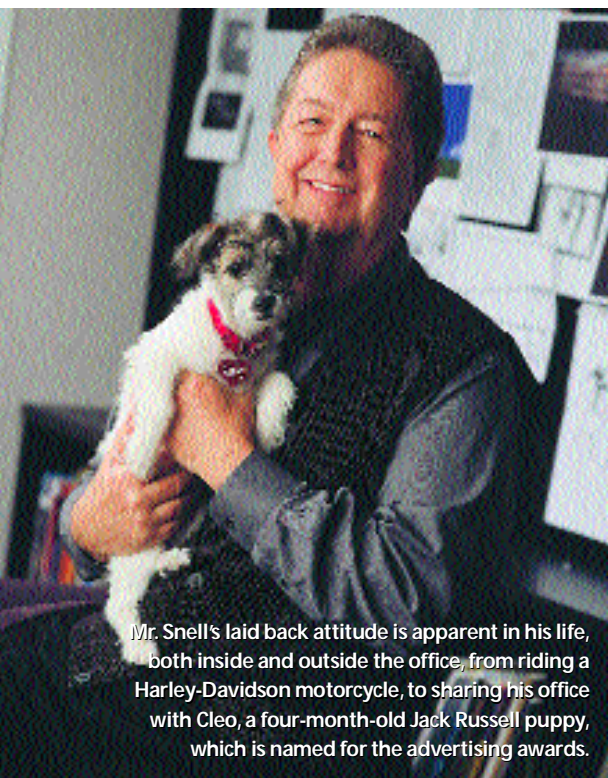
"What I like most about riding is that it forces me to focus on what I'm doing — I need to keep my mind on the road," he explains. "Riders can't let their minds go wandering into what's going on at work, or what's going on at home, or anything like that, because if they do, they better get off the road. A motorcycle will go where its rider looks, which means it's really important to keep that focus. It has trained me to be more focused in every aspect of life."

He endeavors to put that focused approach into practice at the start of every day. "When I start the day, I try to identify two to three things that I'm really going to focus on, so I don't allow too many other issues to creep in."

Even after 25 years, Mr. Snell has a passion for the creative process. "Every once in a while I get an idea in the middle of the night and it gets my mind going. When that happens, it's almost like a creative high," he says.

Mr. Snell considers his influence on the company's culture to be as significant as the agency's creative development. "Culture is very important to the type of work that we do," he says. "My aim is to nurture the culture we have developed at the agency. I have grown up with a number of people at GSW and it is heartening to note that they are practicing the values that we have worked to bring about." ♦

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build on that. We will continue to build a global presence in Europe and Australasia. However, evolving the company's international business will not be at the expense of neglecting business that is under our roof currently.

WHAT DO YOU ENVISION YOUR KEY ROLE TO BE AS INCHORD MOVES FORWARD?

To expand our brand portfolio. We want the solutions we offer to our clients to be as seamless as possible by working through a single point of

ment company based in Doylestown, Pa.

contact, regardless of which inChord company is actually performing the work.

WHAT ARE THE AGENCY'S GOALS?

Currently we are, as far as we know, the largest independent communications organization in the healthcare arena, and we will continue to

HOW HAVE CLIENT CHALLENGES HELPED THE AGENCY PROVIDE SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE?

We had one new business client, who early on was very dictatorial. I never could quite figure out why they hired us. It was a case of a 'just do as we ask, do as we direct' and I thought they're paying us a lot of money, but they're not really using our minds. There was not a lot of involvement, from our standpoint, in market research to evaluate concepts, and I felt we were never doing our best work, and that it wasn't in our best interest or their brand's interest to continue. Ultimately it helped us define conversations that we would have with a new client early on, and how we would successfully work with them in the future. From that sprang our partnership credo, which defines what the client's and agency's expectations are, and establishes a basis for open communication. There will be times when problems arise, but in a partnership it's much easier to work through those difficulties and correct them when everyone knows what the expectations are at the outset. Those are the relationships that will be longstanding.