

New technology tools help Glaxo, Novartis, Quest

BY NICOLA PARACCHINI
San Francisco Business Times

Viscira's technology helps pharmaceutical reps to communicate better with doctors about products.

While its technology ranges from iPad marketing apps to online presentation platforms to 3-D animation for virtual reality

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Viscira gives pharmas a boost

simulations, all its products benefit pharmaceutical, biotech and medical device companies. Viscira — which doubles as an interactive marketing company and a software designer — landed GlaxoSmithKline, Biogen Idec, Novo Nordisk and Quest Diagnostics as clients in 2012, which boosted revenue from \$9 million in 2011 to \$13 million last year.

Viscira's business has revved up thanks to booming demand for new communication technology. The interaction between a pharma sales representative and a doctor may be a 15-second encounter as both parties run down a hospital hallway. That's the situation founder and CEO Dave Gulezian had in mind when Viscira developed QuickFlip technology for the iPad, which allows pharma sales reps to display information on the go. That's just one facet of what Viscira does.

Viscira operates in three sectors — software, technical and digital — to help life science companies deliver their product information. Each service or product is customized based on the client's business and marketing objectives. Viscira also makes educational tools. Their 3-D animation technology can be used by physicians to help patients or caregivers better understand a disease.

On the sales rep side, the Enhanced KOL video module features a full-body green-screen and video commentary, which allows a speaker to interact with on-screen presentation graphics — animated charts, graphs, and videos. This past year, Viscira added two new patent filings to their intellectual property portfolio and plan to add two more in 2013.

Viscira was funded by angel investors when it was founded in 2007 and has been profitable ever since. Besides adding new clients in the past year, Viscira continues to strengthen ties with customers Genentech-Roche, Johnson & Johnson and Novartis.

With an average annual growth rate of 63 percent since 2007, the biggest challenges for Viscira have been related to growth.

"Specifically, learning how to handle spikes in demand, while making sure that our customers are happy," said Gulezian.

The company grew from one employee to over 100 in five years. It started out at a 1,200-square-foot space in SoMa. The startup kept annexing adjoining suites until

it could go no further. Now Viscira is in a 13,000-square-foot space at 200 Vallejo St. It also has 2,000 square feet in New York.

Expansion also brought production and employee challenges for the company.

"Sometimes there are unrealistic expectations. You try to make sure you're responsive. We're setting expectations realistically and growing revenue, but making sure our standards don't drop over time," said Gulezian. "The other part is continuing to innovate."

Gulezian was bit by the entrepreneurial bug while getting his M.B.A. at Stanford. Gulezian co-founded Ucopia in 1997, a gift registry software tool for retailers, which was acquired by Primedia Inc. What led to Viscira, however, was Gulezian's work for a consulting firm for a pharma company.

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with doctors and patients in a more visual and interesting way," he said.

Viscira's staff is a blend of executives, marketers, programmers, artists and Ph.D. medical writers, who vet the scientific accuracy of their products. In the past year, they added positions in business development and software development departments.

Gulezian says the company has various competitors for different parts of their business, including Digitas Health, Razorfish and healthcare agency CDML.

Kathleen Maher, vice-president of Tiburon-based Jon Peddie Research, which tracks content creation and design software for the computer graphics and animation industries, said Viscira is a step ahead of its competitors.

Viscira "is getting into virtual reality, helping doctors and patients understand what a disease would be like, extending the experiential aspect of medicine," said Maher. "It makes a lot of sense."

Viscira wants to expand its product portfolio, client list and international presence with formal offices in Europe.

"We're already doing global work, we have a footprint abroad, but we want to formalize that more and have business development people on the ground."

SNAPSHOT:

Viscira

HQ: San Francisco.

What it does: Develops interactive, new media solutions, and software products for the life sciences industry.

CEO: Dave Gulezian.

Funding: Angel funding.

2010 revenue: \$5.2 million.

2011 revenue: \$9 million.

2012 revenue: \$13 million.

Three-year growth rate: 150 percent.

Founded: 2007.

Employees: Approximately 100.

Web site: viscira.com

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