

Orbis settles in following year-long executive mess

By Craig McGuire

CHICAGO: Over a year after its acquisition by Healthway Communications, things have finally begun to settle down at the Orbis Broadcast Group.

The mid-1998 purchase of Orbis by Healthway — since renamed HealthAnswers — was the first in a string of 11 deals inked by the Austin-based company. The deal sparked an overhaul of senior management at Orbis, including the departure of three of the company's founders.

David Manilow was the first to go, leaving not long after the sale. In October, CEO and partner Jeff Bohanson left for Singapore, where he assumed the newly created post of president and COO of HealthAnswers International (a wholly owned subsidiary operating in the Asia Pacific arena). The third remaining partner, Tim Barr, stayed on until only recently.

While Barr, one of the chief architects behind last year's Orbis/PR Newswire partnership, was rumored to have been forced out, company sources said the conflict was exaggerated. Two high-ranking sales execs, Tierney Kennedy and Lou Cafiero, also left following the acquisition.

"I don't know if I'd call it a

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Vital signs... since being bought in 1998, Orbis has seen three of its founders take their leave

housecleaning," said newly appointed president Cynthia Patrasso. "It was more of a restructuring, placing everybody where their talents will be put to the best use." Patrasso, in her pre-Orbis life as a VP and executive producer at Intersport, was part of the team that broke the story of the infamous assault on Olympic skater Nancy Kerrigan.

HealthAnswers has reorganized its business into five lines, with Orbis folded into the New Media Division under CEO Holly Atkinson, also hired earlier this month. According to Patrasso, other major staffing duties still on Orbis' agenda include filling the vacant director of sales post as well as adding additional sales-related positions.

Industry sources have ques-

tioned the effects of the restructuring on Orbis' efforts to expand beyond its health-care niche under the PR Newswire agreement.

"There is no question that our core business is and will continue to be health," Patrasso said. "But as long as we can provide products and services to customers outside the health arena, we will continue to do so."