TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

ABC APPOINTS DIRECTOR, MERGER WITH IBA OFF

WASHINGTON, D.C.—In the aftermath of failed merger talks between the Industrial Biotechnology Association (IBA, Washington, DC) and the Association of Biotechnology Companies (ABC, Washington, DC), the two trade organizations agreed to “continue to be friendly” and to “increase interactions”—albeit amidst heightened competition. Meanwhile, Pamela Bridgen, who this fall was named the new executive director of ABC, has begun reformulating her organization's agenda.

Last summer, rumors were swirling about a possible IBA-ABC merger. ABC was having difficulty finding a new executive director, and there were reports of budget problems. Its brand of trade-organization populism (ABC has more than 240 members, who pay fairly low dues) seemed in danger. IBA assesses corporate members at higher rates, but a lower membership and a perceived elitist attitude has some critics wondering whether it fully represents the biotechnology community.

Besides the potential cost savings from consolidating the two trade or-

ganizations, some contend that a single voice for the biotechnology community would wield more influence in Washington. After years of developing distinctive styles and keeping their distance on key issues, the two groups briefly joined hands last summer to oppose federal legislation calling for registration fees of facilities regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Nonetheless, the courtship failed. According to some sources, the two organizations could not be combined without one engulfing the other. The decision not to merge already is prompting renewed competition between the two groups, with IBA seeking new members from among small companies with low revenues, traditionally a mainstay of ABC. IBA president Richard Godown also pointedly says that IBA is “the voice for the biotechnology industry.”

Meanwhile, Bridgen is setting ABC's agenda, and hoping to increase membership and to get members “more involved” at both the local and federal levels. ABC also will be taking positions and instituting pro-

grams in several new areas, e.g. formulating a biotechnology curriculum for junior and senior high school students. Plans call for developing source books for teachers outlining easily adaptable laboratory exercises and also a manual for companies providing guidance on community-level educational strategies to enhance biotechnology's image.

In addition, ABC recently took a strong stance calling for reform of the Orphan Drug Act, insisting that it should not be used to cover high-profit products. The tax incentive provisions in the Orphan Drug Act “are not very meaningful for small and still-unprofitable companies” and thus need reconsideration, according to Bridgen. In a similar spirit, ABC will continue scrutinizing regulatory proposals such as the Toxic Substances Control Act regulations drafted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to ensure that “small companies are not...driven out of business,” Bridgen says. Working with EPA “will take a big chunk of next year,” she believes.

—Jeffrey L. Fox

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