



**AT THE HELM**

Jessica Boden (President), Jerrold Gershone (CEO), Judy Kessel (Owner and Chairman of the Board)

**PERFORMANCE**

Had “one of the best years” in the firm’s 28-year history

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Snagged assignments from Baxter, Gambro and Smith & Nephew

Doubled its amount of digital work

Headcount edged up into the mid-40s

**CHALLENGES**

Combating an influx of competitors

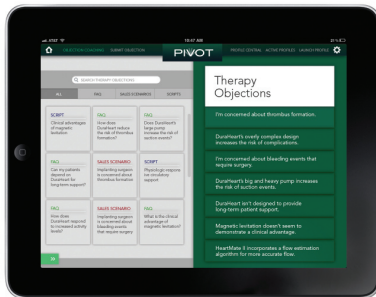
For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 181

**“We’re embracing change by staying true to who we are”**

—Jessica Boden

# StoneArch Creative

Minneapolis agency successfully defends its medical-devices turf



StoneArch Creative’s offices in Minneapolis greet would-be conference callers with an odd directive. Rather than punching in a passcode or giving their name, they’re told that they should “ask to be transferred to the Left Brain.” That directive might strike some as a little disorienting, adding a neurology component to what’s usually a simple business transaction. So it comes as a relief when StoneArch president Jessica Boden explains that each of the firm’s conference rooms are named after a body part: eye, heart, gut, etc. “I like being in the left brain. It channels my analytical side,” she jokes.

Boden has some pretty good reasons to be smiling. At a time when any number of firms have attempted to encroach on StoneArch’s well-established turf in the medical-device category, the agency enjoyed a 2011 that she calls “one of the best years in our 28-year history, and definitely our best in the last three.” The firm doubled its amount of digital work and grew several client relationships from project-based to AOR—and it did so without straying from any of its traditional strengths.

“We’ve always been deliberate about the size of our organization and about the type of clients we work with,” Boden explains. “Our footprint might be more global than it was, but we have no interest in branch-

ing out into the pharma space. What we did was go deeper into medical devices. Part of your expertise is knowing what you do really well.”

Boden downplays the agency’s sustained success, pointing to its favorable location (Minneapolis is something of a hub for medical-device companies) as well as its ability to nurture longstanding relationships (“lots of folks move around in the device space. Once you have fans, they take you with them,” she notes). That said, personality and geography alone weren’t responsible for the new-business surge, which included assignments from Baxter (on learning/education projects), Gambro and Smith & Nephew (both for product launches).

The agency didn’t lose or resign any accounts, but Boden says that it “wrapped up some good project-based work.” Besides, she’s philosophical about client comings-and-goings: “Over time, you see customers go after the shiny new thing—and then, a few years later, they come back.”

That isn’t to suggest that Boden has a come-and-get-us attitude towards the scores of agencies honing in on StoneArch’s business. To combat the influx of competitors, StoneArch is tooting its own horn a bit more than it has in the past. The firm is also emphasizing its medical-device heritage. “It sounds contradictory, but we’re embracing change by staying true to who we are,” Boden says.

As for other changes, the year saw some succession atop the StoneArch hierarchy. Boden, who was formerly executive creative director, became president,



StoneArch Creative’s iPad work for the Pivot (above left) and a public-service ad (above)

while StoneArch founder and president Judy Kessel eased over to the role of chairman of the board (“My value to the business was working on the business rather than in the business,” she wrote on the agency blog). Other key new hires included Phil Hoch as creative director.

In terms of head count, StoneArch edged up into the mid-40s, though Boden says the firm can “activate” up to 75 people on short notice. While client demand could easily backstop further expansion, Boden doesn’t think it’s in the firm’s interest to grow rapidly. “Whatever growth comes, we want it to be controlled and intentional,” she says. “Being able to say that we’re ‘small and smart’ helps us differentiate ourselves.” —Larry Dobrow