



# Guard Dog Brand Development

This firm doubled in size by casting its nets far beyond blockbusters

## AT THE HELM

Co-presidents and managing partners Maria Casini and Camille DeSantis

## PERFORMANCE

Revenue doubled from 2010 to 2011

## HIGHLIGHTS

Worked as brand development strategists for the VHA Enterprise of three companies

Serve as global AOR for Abbott Nutrition, working on Glucerna and PediaSure among others

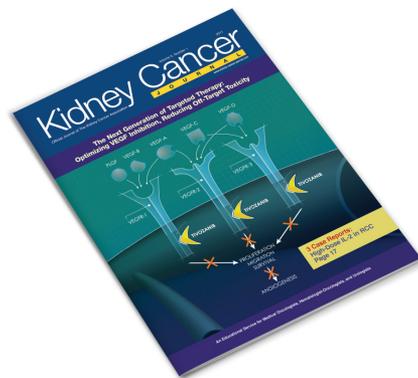
## CHALLENGES

Finding the right new people to meet their needs

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

**“We’ve finally hit our stride and people are looking for Guard Dog”**

—Camille DeSantis



Guard Dog Brand Development’s founders, Maria Casini and Camille DeSantis, knew right from the start what kinds of projects they wanted their firm to be involved in. They devised to split their business into three equal parts: corporate identity, mature products, and pre-launch. “If there are no more blockbusters, we’ll be doing just fine,” quips Casini, who shares the title of Guard Dog co-president and managing partner with DeSantis. “We deliberately built our model so that our portfolio stays equally balanced between corporate, science, and product identity. It’s about measured and strategic growth for us in many areas of identity development.”

Guard Dog Brand Development has seen its revenue double from 2010 to 2011. They are brand development strategists for the VHA Enterprise of three companies: VHA, Novation and Provista. They continue to serve as the global AOR for Abbott Nutrition, working on Glucerna, Ensure Acti M2, Ensure NutriVigor and PediaSure. And early this year, the agency picked up work for Merrimack Pharmaceuticals, for identity development.

With some strong wins under their belt, Guard Dog

has, for now, proven their mantra of consistent and tactical growth. “We’re definitely in a better place than we were last year; we’ve seen major organic growth from existing clients and industry recognition that allowed us some new business.” Casini asserts; “we’ve been lucky in a lot of ways. It’s been a good year for us.”

As their exposure increases, both partners DeSantis and Casini, note that the perspective on their agency has fundamentally changed with their recent success, DeSantis offers: “I think what happened is, we formed this company, and the general response was: ‘oh it’s Maria and Camille’s company,’ and they came looking for us. But now, we’ve finally hit our stride and people are looking for Guard Dog. The agency has now taken on a life its own.”

Most of Guard Dog’s main services center on brand strategy and design, with more of a top-bottom approach to pre-launch brands, as well as life-cycle management for more mature products. Given this, the agency is not heavily entrenched in digital. Casini notes, “As channel agnostics, digital is not a core part of our business; however, our work informs digital communications.”

When Guard Dog was formed in 2007, DeSantis and Casini grew their staff from old colleagues and partners they had previously worked with. With their recent success, they find themselves trying to find new talent to meet growing demand. “We’re actively cultivating dedicated teams of seasoned people, many of whom have a very long history of working with us,” DeSantis confirms, “The challenge is finding seasoned



**Guard Dog has done work for (from above left) AVEO Pharmaceuticals, PediaSure and VHA**

people who have remained curious and open to learning new ways of developing identities.”

In the coming year, Guard Dog is optimistic about the agency’s opportunities for growth and is looking to bring in work from industries outside the healthcare field. “If you notice, healthcare is not in the name of our company,” notes DeSantis. “That was intentional. While we have significant healthcare experience, we also have experience outside of healthcare. Our goal is to develop both the healthcare and non-healthcare sides of our business. We’re already heavily involved in corporate identity development outside of the pharmaceutical industry.” —Kevin McCaffrey