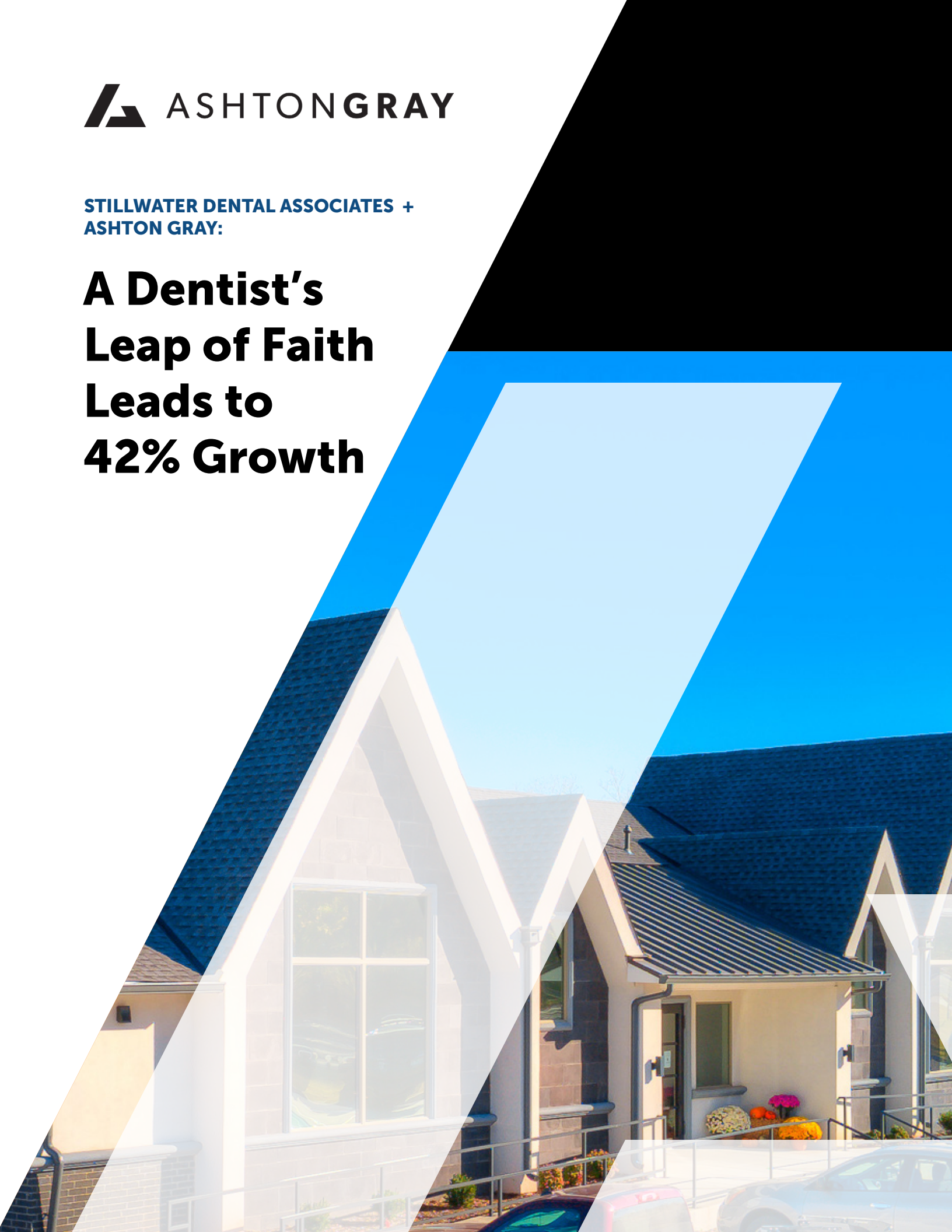




**STILLWATER DENTAL ASSOCIATES +
ASHTON GRAY:**

A Dentist's Leap of Faith Leads to 42% Growth





Stillwater, Oklahoma native Dr. Zach McNickle decided to take a chance. While studying business management in college, Dr. McNickle was also working at a dental supply company. The work there inspired him to switch majors, and colleges, ultimately leading him to the University of Oklahoma College of Dentistry.

Dr. McNickle graduated in 2003 and joined Stillwater Dental Associates in his hometown. His decision to switch majors paid off, he had enjoyed a 17-year career at Stillwater Dental Associates, eventually becoming owner, but his business had hit a ceiling.

“We were way over capacity in our building,” recalls Dr. McNickle. “Our parking lot was inadequate. The final straw was when I had an elderly patient have to walk a block and a half to get into our building. We couldn’t expand the footprint of the building or the parking lot. I was also tired of the air conditioner going out every year and different things that go along with having an older building.”

It was clear that Stillwater Dental had outgrown its current facility, but to make the leap from a stable location with nearly two decades of history to an unknown location meant Dr. McNickle had to take another gamble on the future of his career.

“The number one fear is always money and being on the hook for a big project,” explains Dr. McNickle. “I was also concerned about moving locations since our patients were used to coming to that office.”





Site Selection, Design, and Construction

Once Dr. McNickle had decided to build a new facility and partnered with Ashton Gray, the hunt for a new location began. Dr. McNickle sought a site that would keep his current patients happy, expand his current capabilities, and attract new patients.

"I love the traffic of the road that we're on," Dr. McNickle says, referencing his new facility's location. "Stillwater is still growing. Over the last few years, there have been many new neighborhoods. There's foot traffic and several businesses next door that put a lot of eyeballs on our building. But the main thing is I love this location, it's very pretty. We have a pond in the back, which is relaxing for the patients."

Once the site was selected, the next step for Dr. McNickle and his team was to work with Ashton Gray's team of design professionals. This collaboration requires back-and-forth communication between the parties and ultimately pairs the expertise of the AG Design team with the day-to-day workflows and needs of the Stillwater Dental Associates team, as well as the long-term vision of the business.

With plenty of experience in the healthcare sector, the Ashton Gray Design team proved invaluable in the design of the operatories and sterilization area of the building. "They made some suggestions that really improved and made my staff able to work more quickly and efficiently," recalls Dr. McNickle.

After the design phase, construction was set to begin but an unforeseen issue would delay the project — weather.

"The biggest thing that went wrong is there was a giant flood right as we were about to start," says Dr. McNickle recollecting the construction phase. "We learned we had to add 18 inches of concrete to the foundation. That delayed the project quite a bit."

New construction always includes the potential for bumps in the road, but Dr. McNickle learned to take his hands off the wheel and trust the construction experts at Ashton Gray.

"As a dentist, you want to control everything," explains Dr. McNickle. "And with construction, you have to trust the experts. Once I finally figured out these people knew what they were doing, let them do their job, it made my life a lot easier. Obviously, I wanted to get into my new beautiful building."

Dr. McNickle also leaned on the expertise of his staff in the design and construction of the new Stillwater Dental Associates facility, resulting in a better facility and happier staff.

"The feedback from staff on the building has universally been excellent. I let them be involved in the planning process, they had input in the layout of the operatories, they can run instruments quickly and efficiently — our hygienists are really happy with the layouts of their rooms," says Dr. McNickle.

"As far as new employees, they're always really impressed with the building. There aren't a lot of dental offices that look like this. So, it makes an impression on staff or prospective employees when they walk in. It's a beautiful building and puts people at ease," explains Dr. McNickle.

"We've grown about 42% in the last three years. It's been worth the hardship and stress of going through a new building, making that decision, putting yourself on the line, and committing to it. It's been worth everything. It's just been fantastic."

Dr. Zach McNickle



Stillwater Dental Associates Expands Past Comfort Zones

With the brand new building complete with a sparkling pond out back and plenty of parking, Dr. McNickle, the Stillwater Dental Associates team, and their patients have been thrilled with the direction of their business. "Patients love it," says Dr. McNickle. "I've had universally excellent feedback about the new building and patients have said they haven't seen an office quite like it before. They feel like it has a nice blend of dental office with a somewhat homey feel."

The new location hasn't just translated into happy long-term patients but also an influx of new patients and revenue. "It has been way beyond anything I expected," Dr. McNickle says of his business growth. "We've grown about 42% in the last three years. It's been worth the hardship and stress of going through a new building, making that decision, putting yourself on the line, and committing to it. It's been worth everything. It's just been fantastic."

At Ashton Gray, we've worked with clients who are understandably hesitant to uproot their business. Deciding to expand or build a new facility requires healthcare professionals to expose themselves and their businesses to new risks, but it also exposes businesses to new opportunities. "It is scary," admits Dr. McNickle. "I remember that feeling well, but it

has been worth any stress that it caused. This has led us to grow our practice at just an astounding rate. I expected growth, but I've been blown away by the amount of growth that we had."

Just like Dr. McNickle's decision to study dentistry instead of business, his decision to move locations, build a new facility, and partner with Ashton Gray required a leap of faith but he maintained his belief in himself throughout.

"I think dentists have always been willing to bet on themselves because you're willing to bet that you can do well enough in undergraduate school and take the DAT and get accepted into dental school. Then you're betting on yourself to get through dental school and the student loans will all be worth it. And finally, that's what I thought to myself — I've bet on myself this far, and it's worked out really well in life. I'm gonna bet on myself again. When I say betting on myself, I'm counting on my staff, obviously, and my wife and family. They all had the same feeling, they were willing to bet on me too. And it's been one of the best decisions I've made in my life."

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