

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Interview

In the PaLRaP Spotlight: Tim Mulholland

*Digital Asset Management Librarian,
Zippo Manufacturing Company, Bradford, PA*



Interview by Stephanie Campbell

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Tell us a little about yourself, specifically, your career trajectory and what led you to special librarianship?

After I received my library degree from the University of South Carolina, I had a number of unique opportunities in librarianship. I interned in technical services, which helped me get a job at DLA Piper, one of the largest corporate law libraries in the world. Then I spent almost five years working for Dawnbreaker, Inc., a private consulting firm doing market-based research for small businesses. Those experiences, working with large databases and a diverse group of constituents, helped me in my current role with Zippo.

Zippo's history combines ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and popular culture. Tell us about your role as digital asset management librarian.

Prior to 2019, Zippo collected digital images, videos, and logos but these efforts were managed by multiple individuals in several different roles with other responsibilities. Assets were shared between colleagues and customers often through email.

The digital asset management (DAM) librarian is a new position with the goal of establishing the new digital library as the "one stop-shop" for everyone under the Zippo/Case (Case knives) umbrella.

We started with over 70,000 digital assets and developed a taxonomy and unified metadata structure to accommodate users worldwide. The biggest lesson learned there is to be consistent and clear in your verbiage. As librarians, we know how many different ways someone could describe or search for material so we need to be clear and consistent in our verbiage, for example, an AC/DC lighter image with a guitar in the background.

Besides metadata and tagging, the biggest part of my role is on-boarding and training new users. We have exceeded 200 users in over 40 countries who use our system in some capacity and every one of them has been trained to navigate, search for, download, and share assets. I also administer the hierarchy of users, determine which users need access to which groups of assets.

Tell us about Zippo's digital assets.

We have everything from product photography, logos, marketing materials, videos, historical images, company documents and presentations, and more. We had to build our metadata structure to accommodate all these different types of assets. While most of our product images are lighters or outdoor products, people may not know that Zippo sells a wide range of products globally, such as sunglasses, reading glasses, wallets, and jewelry. Case has its own logos, marketing materials, and product images. Zippo also recently added Northern Lights candles and while we have just started adding some Northern Lights assets, we will need to make sure we can accommodate candle images in our metadata structure going forward.

Earlier I mentioned the many different ways someone could describe or search for a picture of an AC/DC lighter with a guitar, now imagine how differently a user would describe a video commercial of someone using a Case pocket knife in Moab, or an Italian billboard ad concept for Zippo sunglasses, or the smell of a Northern Lights/Zippo branded candle. The DAM system needs to accommodate all of these things. We constantly look for feedback on how people are searching and adjust our metadata to make it easier.

Internally, some of the heaviest users of the DAM system are graphic designers and photographers, social media, marketing, and licensing staff, plus e-commerce managers who need quick access to product images to maintain e-commerce platforms.

Zippo has a diverse network of agency partners, field sales managers, distributors, and customers. Many of them use the DAM system to access product imagery or marketing materials to aid in their own sales or marketing processes. Some of our international offices are creating their own video or photo promotional content unique to their markets, so the goal is to get all content creators to use the same metadata and add to the digital library to make for a truly unified global system.

Do you also handle the archives/records management of the companies owned by Zippo?

Zippo has a full-time archivist on staff with a large collection. Zippo has been quite meticulous about keeping its history intact. There are, of course, business records and historical advertisements, but also stacks and stacks of lighter products and designs that Zippo has made since the beginning (1932). For someone who loves archival work it's a treasure trove.

While our archivist is responsible for maintaining this collection, there is some crossover with our DAM system to incorporate archival finding aids and historical description metadata.

It is similar with records management. We have slowly been adding Zippo/Case business records and operational forms with the goal that the cloud-based DAM system will be the single source. We have Zippo constituents all over the world so the ability for users to access records and forms at any hour of the day, from anywhere, is important for our operations.

Describe some of the items found at the Zippo/Case Museum and/or library.

The Zippo/Case museum is worth a visit! It is a unique piece of Americana that really tells the story of Zippo. It has exhibits on quirky stories about Zippo lighters, clips of movies featuring Zippo lighters, and exhibits on unique products made over the years. My personal favorite museum piece is a lighter that was dropped on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day that somehow made it back to Bradford years later.

Can you provide a few general statistics to illustrate the library's usage?

Usage started out slow and then grew exponentially as we on-boarded more users and people got used to the system. We are averaging around 20,000 downloads per month. In total, we have seen over 100,000 downloads in 44 different countries since our launch last year. The heaviest users so far are in marketing and e-commerce.

Describe a day-in-the-life at your facility.

It is a lot like a traditional library in many ways from reference transactions (answering questions, training new users in finding assets) to technical services aspects (adding new assets, tagging them with the proper metadata) plus also making sure the rights to images are properly documented. Administration and curation of collections is also ongoing. When Zippo launches new products, we work with the marketing team to create the launch page with information and accompanying product images, logos, lifestyle images, etc.

Do you get to drive the Zippo Car or Zippo Jeep?

No, not yet! But I often park right next to where both the Zippo Car and Zippo Jeep are parked so it's something cool to look at as you walk into work on a Monday morning.

Finally, can you tell us why you do what you do?

I really enjoy working to solve problems. It is a challenge getting the right assets to the right people across the Zippo/Case operations, so I enjoy coming to work to build on this project to solve that problem. It is also a new software for the company and, like any change, it requires getting people to embrace the new way of doing things. I really enjoy meeting with our users and showing them what they can do with our system and watching them “buy in.”