

## Soutron Custom Information Portals Support LaFrance Learning Library and Knowledge Management Initiatives

### INTRODUCTION

With over 70 years of branding and decorative trim expertise, LaFrance Corp serves a variety of industries, from automotive and electronics, to eyewear and cosmetics, and even home improvement, providing their design, engineering, and production services to bring branding design ideas to life, whether it's a power button, a volume key, logo/name plate or decorative trim.

A belief in a continuous focus on learning and evolving stemming from the founder of LaFrance, Joseph A. Teti Jr, motivated the company to establish Learning as one of its Core Values. Promoting that importance, in 2017 LaFrance established LaFrance University to keep that vision alive for the company to continue to create innovative solutions and maximize their value in their market.

### CHALLENGE

To support their knowledge-based University, LaFrance initially had utilized Microsoft file shares along with the Bridge Learning Management System (LMS) to manage some of their internal training material. "That technology combination just wasn't getting the results they wanted," states Caroline Hayden, Learning Organization Librarian with LaFrance.

With C-level support and advocacy, an initiative to develop an online library for the company that could be used to capture internal knowledge supporting learning and development was established, in addition to a librarian position that would support their training and education programs.



One of the first things that Caroline accomplished after joining the organization was to research different corporate library platforms such as Lucidea and Soutron, in addition to digital asset management systems (DAMS) like ResourceSpace, and knowledge base platforms such as Confluence, looking for a platform that would meet the results that LaFrance wanted for capturing and preserving internal knowledge.

The company needed to be able to make their training and reference material more discoverable and immediately usable for LaFrance colleagues to support their internal knowledge management and product development initiatives.



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LaFrance Corp



They determined they needed an integrated library system that had a great support team and a product that allowed LaFrance to be flexible and creative in how they would use the system to make their learning courses available in the library for training. "As we spoke with ILS vendors, Soutron really stood out in that they provided the support and flexibility we needed at a good price," states Caroline.



## SOLUTION

Soutron was selected because their library management system for corporate libraries met the unique needs of LaFrance's corporate learning initiative, enabling the use of the library system not only for the LaFrance internal curriculum that they create, but also the learning and reference materials for their business units.

### Custom Information Portals

The new LaFrance corporate learning library supports not only the knowledge management and learning initiatives for different company departments, but also for individual business units. To support the varied requirements of the company's departments and business units, individual information portals were created as needed.

One of the largest industries the LaFrance learning library serves is the automotive industry with their business unit Benmatt Industries, which works with automotive dealerships across the nation, handling their on-car branding and promotional needs.

To support those needs, LaFrance has developed testing guidelines, environmental specifications, and material safety data sheets for a variety of manufacturing materials, such as finishes and the adhesives that are used, all of which need to be easily retrievable from the library. Also included in the library are marketing and account development materials, product prototypes, and case studies that the marketing department created.

"We have internal learning material that we create and house, such as graphic visuals and high-level workshops like basic introductions to our product lines," states Caroline. "When we have new hires, they can watch these internal workshops that we've recorded directly from within the learning library."

To keep these custom portals up-to-date, Caroline gathers relevant resources such as workflow process videos, making them directly viewable in the library portal, along with PDFs on testing specifications and guidelines in addition to technical resources on finishes and aesthetic capabilities.

### PDF & Video Viewing Direct from the Library Record

"The PDF viewer is very helpful in Soutron, all I need to do is upload a PDF file and then my colleagues can read the file right in the library record. With the videos, I upload them onto Microsoft Stream and use the rich text field within Soutron to embed the video so that people can watch the videos right from the Library record without having to go anywhere or having any kind of access issues," states Caroline. "It's really made access to learning very, very nice."

### Portal Customization for Training Resources

Soutron's online search portal pages are easy to customize to support an organization's information access needs. The product supports the creation of custom resource pages that can be linked to library portal home pages, thus providing direct access to those resources. As an example, to promote the availability of a training course, a custom page was created to provide LaFrance colleagues access to the course from a library portal link leading them to a custom training resource page where they move through the lessons directly from the library.

### Subject Collection Guides and Saved Searches

"I make heavy use of the Soutron saved searches feature to create subject guides," states Caroline. "I create saved searches to create collections geared towards a business unit and hyperlink them onto the portal home pages. They have quick and easy navigation to curated subjects and topics that people can click on and see what we have within that specific topic. Having those links right there is a nice way of leading them into navigating the library system and discovering the information and materials that are available to them."

### Thesaurus Streamlines Communication & Searches

Caroline is also appreciative of the Soutron thesaurus creating a controlled vocabulary for internal LaFrance terminology because it “is helpful for keeping the way we communicate about certain topics all on the same page, and really helps people with filtering for relevant search results. “The Thesaurus does make communication a little more streamlined,” states Caroline.

### Unique Custom Field creation

To satisfy the unique needs of LaFrance, such as making search results available by LaFrance record ID numbers, it is easy in Soutron to create custom fields and have the record ID field available to search.

One such need began when LaFrance marketing started sharing record IDs in promotional emails. A need then surfaced to search the library records by the record number. Caroline states: “I added the record ID number field onto the advanced search page so that way people can look for that specific record number in the Record ID field and get the exact record needed.”

### Knowledge Curation

To curate the knowledge materials in the library, Caroline does a lot of leg work, collaborating with colleagues in different departments to identify what is worth putting into the library, asking if materials need to be created, especially if that knowledge doesn't exist yet in documented form.

“I'm very familiar and comfortable with promotion and advocacy, having to reach out to colleagues and create relationships with them and maintain and nurture those relationships. That way it becomes a lot easier to collaborate with people anywhere in the company to say ‘I've heard that you guys were doing some project management or perhaps learning meetings, and asking if there any learning materials that come out of those that we should add into the library? Did they record those meetings? Can those meeting recordings be put into the library?’,” says Caroline.

“But everybody is so busy, what I often will do is tell them to just give me what they have, don't bother with any formal submission systems. I tell them to just point me to a folder location and I will evaluate the material as it is. For example, with a workshop recording, I look to see if the recording needs some chapters added to it to help with people navigating the video, and if that's the case,

then I'll add some chapters for navigation purposes as an extra improvement to the user experience in the library. Then they can jump around the video. Or for a testing document that's hundreds of pages long, maybe I can break that file up into chapters and sections so that people can look for the specific section and topic that they need.”

### Secure Access

The LaFrance Soutron installation is one database and with the use of access permissions directing users to their custom portal page, Caroline says “I'm able to curate and customize their learning experience depending on which portal they go to.”

The main library portal is accessible via Microsoft single sign-on technology, with their sign-in authenticated by Microsoft and Soutron security working hand-in-hand. Access to relevant learning materials is made available using Soutron category and file access permissions extending from higher level executive management, down to specific departments and business units. Default permissions give access to everything that is publicly available company wide. “If there is anything that is unique that a colleague needs access to, I can go in and adjust access permission on a granular level per user,” states Caroline.

## RESULTS

### Promoting LaFrance Corporate Library Resources

To let her colleagues know what materials are in the library, Caroline creates newsletters that specifically target certain audiences.

“There is a library newsletter specifically for a division that will promote any new or recently added items in the library. Or I might do a feature to highlight a resource that's already in the library but might be timely for people depending on the projects that they're working on. Those two newsletters are sent only to those specific divisions, and those are much more targeted. Another newsletter is about companywide learning and development, so any general learning and training resources that are available companywide will go out to really highlight workshops that have been created that are added into the library. If the director of corporate learning has put together any lesson plans that have been added into the library, I'll promote those.”

With Soutron, the learning library and knowledge management needs of LaFrance and that of their business partners are being met on a continuous basis.

Their learning library strengthens the LaFrance brand, encouraging interactive learning and new idea creation, and supporting the vision of their founder into the future.



**Caroline Hayden, MLIS, Learning Resource Librarian,  
LaFrance Corp**

Find out more about LaFrance Corp by visiting their website: [www.lafrancecorp.com](http://www.lafrancecorp.com)

To find out how you can migrate to a fast, secure, cloud-based archive or library management system to support your organization's library, start a conversation with Soutron Global today: [www.soutron.com](http://www.soutron.com)