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A Special Librarian's Corporate Story

PPG, The Hershey Company, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame all have one thing in common – Special Libraries. They are referred to in the industry as “special” because they provide specialized information resources on a particular subject, serve a specialized or limited clientele, and deliver specialized services to that user population. Special libraries include corporate libraries, like PPG and Hershey, as mentioned, but also include governmental, legal, hospital, museum, and even non-profit libraries. Successful organizations have the library in common because they understand the importance of timely and accurate information geared specifically to their needs and knowledge culture.

Special libraries and public libraries may not be entirely different, as each performs traditional library services familiar to you. Take the traditional service of cataloging books. At PPG, we still catalog technical books for search and retrieval. But the difference is that in a special library we take that same skillset and apply it with a twist. So, instead of just cataloging books, we may also “catalog” our internal collections, such as project reports, so those same users can also find relevant or historical information on research projects to avoid re-inventing the wheel. We leverage our traditional library competencies and apply them to internal collections to optimize knowledge sharing within PPG.

And, just as our public library collections are transitioning to include electronic resources, so have many of these types of libraries. Some libraries may no longer have a physical book collection, and only provide access through virtual collections. And still, some may no longer call themselves a library, but still strategically serve information to advance the mission of their organization.

And that's exactly where we differ: these types of libraries usually have a different mission or purpose, not serving the general public, but rather serving their organization uniquely.

For those who may not know, PPG is a global maker of paints, coatings and specialty materials, and is headquartered right here in Pittsburgh. When our scientists dream up new ideas, they may start by reading articles and books that we provide them each week, or use many of the self-service electronic resource tools and subscriptions that we curate and make available via our website, or search our internal report database to see what others have tried in the past. Once they have an invention that meets a customer or market need, they will reach out to the library for more specific research. The library team will then provide search support utilizing patent and chemical databases to provide background or to validate if an idea is novel so that PPG can be successful in garnering patents, the lifeblood of our research organization. PPG was granted 88 US patents in 2020, covering products and technology across our different business units. Did you know that PPG manufactures organic light emitting diode (OLED) materials that bring color to smartphones, televisions and tablets? Or that PPG manufactures the paint that is used to protect the Pittsburgh Penguins' and other

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NHL goal posts from chipping in the cold climate? So many of these products and inventions are what drives the work that is performed in the library and we are proud to have a part in it.

Regardless of the type of library, or what we may call ourselves (librarian, market analyst, info specialist, etc.), libraries and information professionals know how to locate and deploy information, whether it's published, on the web, or in the minds of industry experts. So, if it's an innovative chocolate, a rock and roll documentary, or a cool hockey puck paint, you can be certain a library put knowledge to work.

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