Replacing a Complex and Tired System: Image Relay Modernizes Lake Champlain Chocolates' Workflow

The Challenge

- Backend image and data management was becoming haphazard due to inadequate software
- Legacy systems weren't equipped for a shift towards remote work
- Aging QNAP device holding valuable images and information was becoming increasingly necessary to replace

The Solution

- Purpose-built platform makes product and image management simple
- Unified DAM + PIM solution that is built to scale with growth
- Cloud-based platform ensures smooth collaboration between office or remote-based teams

The Numbers

- 60,000 + assets organized in Image Relay
- 4 retail stores
- 40+ years of accumulated company assets

Lake Champlain Chocolates Company Story

Every holiday season Jim Lampan, owner of a popular local restaurant, would buy his staff high-end chocolates as gifts. One year his pastry chef confessed that the chocolates didn't exactly live up to their hype. In response, Jim proposed a friendly challenge for his chef to make something better. The outcome of the challenge now exists as a multi-generational family business called Lake Champlain Chocolates. They first opened their doors in 1983 and continue to produce premium quality, B Corp and fair trade certified chocolates that are distributed around the nation.

From their humble beginnings, the company has grown to over 100 employees and four storefronts. They have large teams covering various departments, including retail, wholesale, manufacturing, internal operations, e-commerce, sales, and marketing teams.
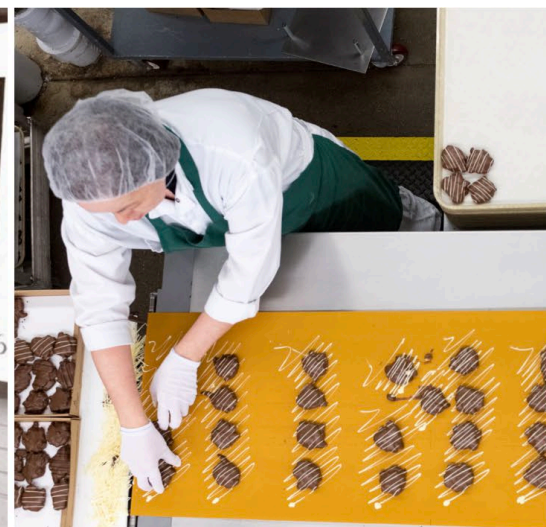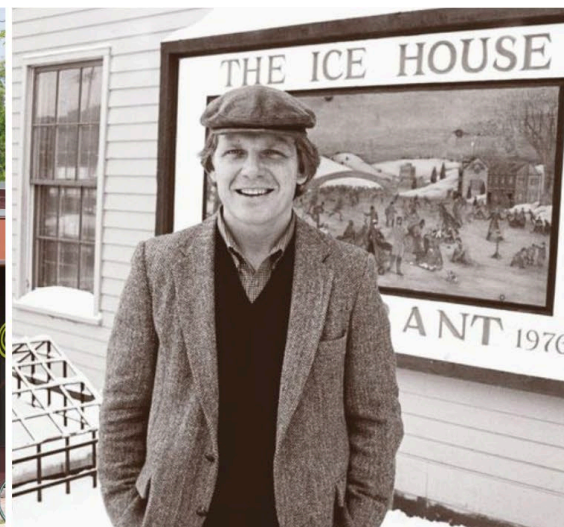
Before Image Relay

As Lake Champlain Chocolates grew through the years their techstack continuously expanded until it became a complex, and aging, system. Their technology included three different enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems: one for wholesale, a second for retail operations, and a third for e-commerce activities. To make it even more unwieldy each ERP system was backed up with a duplicate version based at a different location. The internal management of this setup was chaotic, leading to haphazard storage of important company data, like product images that many parts of the company relied on.

Lake Champlain Chocolates' image storage and management was particularly out of control. The main location where their assets were being stored was a QNAP device in the company's data center. Between the QNAP and the ERP systems, internal teams were unable to identify the ownership, expiration, or newest version of assets… let alone reliably find them in the first place.

Lake Champlain Chocolates organizes over 60,000 assets in their Asset Library.

Updating An Overwhelmed System

Lake Champlain Chocolates flagship store.

By 2022 Lake Champlain Chocolates had identified that something had to change.

"It was a real opportunity to modernize our approach; fill the gaps in our operational processes; find efficiencies; and sort out how we tag, search, use, and store image data," said Allison Myers, Lake Champlain Chocolate's director of customer experience.

The new platform needed to offer fully customizable permissions and version control. The permission function would allow Myers to designate who could add images to the library and make edits. This way everyone could be confident they were only using the latest versions of assets. Image Relay's cloud-based system was a natural choice.

Getting The Team On-Board
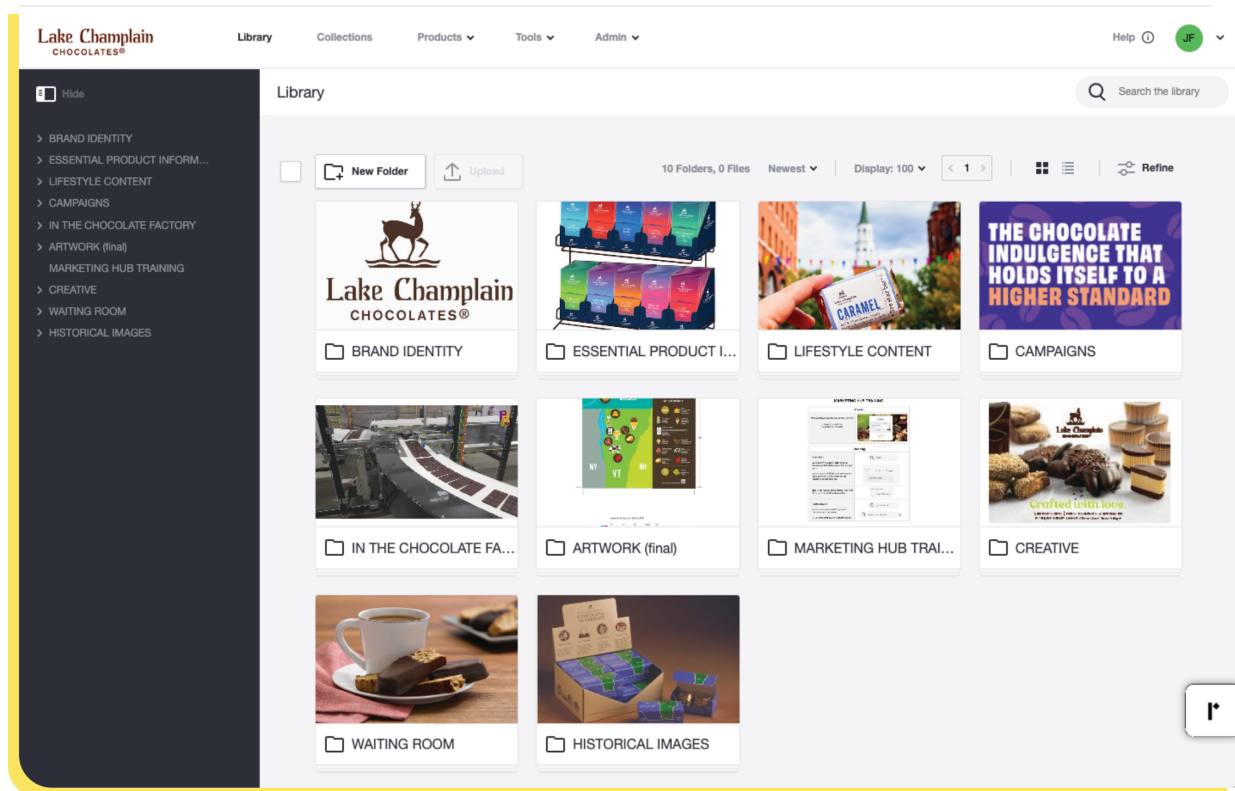
Lake Champlain Chocolates Asset Library. Lake Champlain Chocolates organized their folders based on their most commonly sought-after content themes as well as important internal training documents.

Leveraging Every Feature

Now that the Lake Champlain Chocolates team has had the chance to put the platform to use, they have found ways to utilize features that they weren't expecting. The ability to set expiration dates on assets was appealing to begin with, but internal teams have begun to leverage it for sharing assets with external parties. They're able to set the expiration date for specific time periods, so when the asset goes out of season or is expected to no longer be relevant, they can ensure that no external users are able to access it. This ensures that they're maintaining consistent branding across channels.

Their account administrators have also been enjoying the automatic audit trails tied to each asset in the Library. It provides a clear step-by-step map of downloads, modifications, and who has interacted with assets.

As a whole, Myers shared that she has seen an increase in productivity, particularly for Lake Champlain's purchasing and quality assurance teams. She thinks that's entirely thanks to being able to easily locate images and files and always being confident they are finding the correct version.

> *"Now we know the latest version is in the system and it's the [central] point of truth that gets served up when needed. And, we don't need to tell everyone there is a new file or where to find it."*

A Unique Use For Share Links

Scanning a product's unique QR code will show information beyond what is typically included on a package. This helps inform employees and make information accessible.

- Dimensions
- Weight
- Shelf Life
- Kosher?
- Vegan?
- Ideal Storage Conditions
- Any Other Relevant Info...

Image Relay emphasizes the ability to share easily, accurately, and securely with features like Quick Share Links that lead users to specific assets, product pages, collections, or catalogs.

Lake Champlain Chocolates grasped the ability to link directly to product pages and then took it one step further.

To provide their in-store associates with as much product information, as easily as possible, they made a simple but effective plan. They created a QR code for each of their products that leads anyone who scans it to a specialized view of the product information. Employees in-store can quickly scan a QR code and learn anything they need about shipping information, shelf-life, or specialized ingredient info that wouldn't otherwise be listed on the packaging.

PIM: The Secret Ingredient To Boost Growth

The Lake Champlain Chocolates team is now turning its attention to making the most of the product info management features of Marketing Delivery. Their primary motivation for using the PIM side of the platform is to eliminate redundancies and create a reliable, single source of truth for all of their products. Currently, Lake Champlain Chocolates handles product information by creating specification sheets in Excel right at the factory and then data is tediously added by multiple users. This has proven to be a complicated process that leaves the door open to errors, outdated versions, and edits being made by unauthorized individuals.

Lauren Plankey, Lake Champlain Chocolates IT manager, is looking forward to the ability to generate unique templates for different views of the same information. For instance, a sales rep and a manufacturer require different views of product information, and after setting these specifications once, they'll always be available to viewers. Putting the right information in the right hands is a critical step to internal efficiency and maintaining company-wide consistency.

To learn how Image Relay can help your team achieve success, please reach out to info@imagerelay.com.