

Fruit or Vegetable?

Many of you will remember that Marv Borden, one of Glenair's original founders, was also an avocado grower. Our regular group lunches with Marv would often turn to talk of his ranch, and stories from his many years in the produce industry. I'd like to share one of those stories with everyone because of the valuable lesson I think it holds.

In the 1960s, California avocado farmers were looking for new export markets for their product, and countries in the Pacific Rim were natural targets—particularly Japan where the population's taste for unusual and prestigious foods looked like fertile ground.

And so, with the help of a big-bucks marketing firm, California avocados were introduced in Japan. A marketing campaign, *Avocados: The Healthy Fruit from California* was launched with special public events and tastings. The results were disastrous. Picture gagging Japanese spitting samples into hastily retrieved napkins.

So what was the problem? Why did the Japanese find the avocado so distasteful? Well it turns out that, to a large degree, the use of the term "fruit" in signs and advertising was the problem. Japanese "naturally" expected anything called fruit to be sweet and juicy, and were shocked at the avocado's savory flavor. Japanese advisors to the campaign explained the problem and recommended simply re-branding the fruit as a vegetable. But the California growers were adamant, "Avocados grow on trees and have pits, so they must be classified and described as fruit."

Happily, sounder minds (on the sales sides of the enterprise) prevailed and the Japanese promotional campaign was subsequently re-launched—with a little poetic license—as *Avocados: The Healthy Vegetable from California*. No longer confused by the "fruit" moniker, the Japanese embraced avocados as a unique and versatile vegetable.

You can probably guess the rest of the story. This year it's projected Japan will import over 60,000 tons of avocados—all due to a salesman's decision to willingly view the opportunity through his customer's eyes instead of his own.

And this is the point I want to make for everyone in the Glenair family: There is no upside in viewing any aspect of a business deal solely from one perspective. We should endeavor as well to see the world through the eyes of the other guy; to resist the temptation to believe we alone have the correct view of any problem (or opportunity!). To do otherwise is a kind of arrogance that has no place in our ongoing commitment to fostering win-win relationships with our customers, colleagues, suppliers and partners.

Thanks for reading this fun bit of history. I'm sure Marv would love it that his many stories are still being told around Glenair.

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QwikConnect is published quarterly by Glenair, Inc. and printed in the U.S.A. All rights reserved. © Copyright 2013 Glenair, Inc. A complete archive of past issues of QwikConnect is available on the Internet at www.glenair.com/qwikconnect

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