

# “Gimme Back That Filet-O-Fish”

*-by Bob Salvas, Success Mail*

If you have been watching TV lately, you have probably seen the reappearance of the “Filet-O-Fish” song commercial. I have to say that I almost never recommend television commercials to my marketing clients and I don’t recommend that they eat at McDonald’s either (not that they would ask **me** for dietary advice!).

Yet this commercial makes me laugh and I will also admit to really liking the sandwich. Apparently I am not the only one--- McDonald’s sells about 300 million of Filet-O-Fish sandwiches every year!



From a business perspective the story of the Filet-O-Fish is actually very interesting. Most people are surprised to hear that Ray Kroc (founder of McDonald’s) did **not** even invent the sandwich.

The year was 1962 and Lou Groen was a McDonald’s franchise owner in Ohio and he was really struggling. A big part of his problem was that the area around his restaurant was 87% Catholic and they would often abstain from eating meat on Fridays, especially during the religious season of Lent. Hamburger sales (the only sandwich on the menu at that time) on Fridays were almost nonexistent.

Lou noticed that a local competitor restaurant was successfully serving a fish sandwich on Fridays and many of his customers would go there on that day. So, he decided to create a fish sandwich of his own. Ray Kroc was also aware of the ‘no meat on Fridays’ situation at McDonald’s and created a sandwich of his own called the ‘Hula Burger’ - it basically was a pineapple sandwich.

Ray and Lou decided on a little wager- they each put their item on the menu and decided that McDonald’s would go with whichever hamburger alternative sold the most. Lou’s fish sandwich won easily and became the first permanent addition ever to the McDonald’s menu.

What can we learn from this for our businesses?

**-Every business has a slow season.** What do you do in your slow season? If you use it to get important tasks done or recharge your battery, that is fine. But you might want to consider some creative opportunities to increase your profits while you fill up some of that down time. Long ago, Coca Cola made a strong marketing/advertising push to position their soda as more of a year-round drink. It had previously been viewed as strictly a warm weather beverage. A more common example might be a landscaping company that does snow plowing in the winter when there is no landscaping to be done.

**-Keep one eye on the world around you.** In the story about McDonald's, they were affected by the traditions of a dominant religion. In today's world, one of the key things you would want to watch would be technology. The changes are fast and profound. When was the last time you saw an encyclopedia? And how many people still use the "Yellow Pages" as compared to those who use Google? The internet alone has dramatically changed entire industries. Technology can make you rich or put you out of business.

**-Keep the other eye on the competition.** It was the popularity of the competition's fish sandwich that inspired Lou Groen to invent the Filet-O-Fish. The key here was to make a better fish sandwich and sell his current customers on the product. Do you have a possible product or service that complements an existing product or service? A web developer, for example, could offer search engine optimization. Or a print shop could offer mailing services. Both are natural extensions of what those businesses already do.

Finally, what about *that* commercial? The creative and offbeat idea for the Filet-O-Fish singing fish commercial is relatively new. When it was first aired last year, it got around 300,000 hits on YouTube in the first two weeks. And now the singing fish is back on the wall! (or on TV). But while the idea for the commercial is new, the timing of the commercial is not. It probably comes as no surprise that the newest version of the Filet-O-Fish commercial started showing up on TV just as we entered this season of **Lent!**

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