

BROCK'S BANTER: There ARE other Keinz

By Brock Weir

What's the difference between ketchup and catsup? Well, catsup has more tomatoes, comes in a bigger bottle, is cheaper, but it tastes just like ketchup. Now, we know that's not true but that's what your competitors are saying. They are selling their watered-down, flavourless sauce by pretending they are you. It makes you angry, doesn't it? Me too. But, I always say, if you don't like what they're saying, change the conversation.

So said adwoman Peggy Olson in a room full of Heinz suits in the second half of *Mad Men* as her former boss, and mentor, Don Draper, leaned in to listen from the other side of the closed door to hear what his protégée pitched to a potential new client. They were familiar words. In fact, they were words first uttered by him on the series a season or two before while trying to retain a skeptical client.

The teacher was now the student.

She had learned well.

Immediately following her speech, Peggy stepped to the side and revealed a spiffy new ad campaign for the iconic red sauce. Featuring the equally iconic Heinz bottle on its side, anticipating the deliciously thick liquid to dribble out of the neck with a satisfying 'plop!', the image was framed by the words: 'Heinz. The only ketchup.'

End of conversation, Peggy concluded.

Perhaps it was for a while, but ad execs of the 1960s even those dreamed up in the present day by AMC showrunners couldn't have anticipated that the conversation was far from over, particularly where Canada is concerned.

All you need to do is look at the unlikely surge of national pride and patriotism that has cropped up around ketchup, of all things, resulting in French's Ketchup getting a much-longed-for foothold in the red channels of the condiment market, brilliantly using their capital to keep the Leamington tomato industry alive after Heinz pulled out to take their operations back to their American home. Buying local has never been sweeter and connoisseurs are savouring the competition. (I'll stop there)

French's brainwave is keeping a vital local market alive, scores of people employed, and given Heinz a wake-up call on the importance of community in their business structure.

But, more importantly, it has changed the conversation.

Little more than a year ago, the airwaves were inundated with commercials featuring actors dressed up in Heinz ketchup bottles welcoming their 'new, better tasting' yellow-hued sister of the cruet set to the party.

While the kitsch factor in those ads, looking to gain a foothold in the mustard market, was already through the roof, it now has a certain quaintness in retrospect as while Heinz was pouring money into its efforts to beat French's at its own tangy game, their rival was seeing red and quietly plotting their market domination.

End of conversation.

The conversation shift was never a new technique. It has always been a tried and true method for a variety of objectives, but we are seeing it more and more frequently these days.

We are seeing it in the American primaries going on right now with the Hillary Clinton campaign framing her election bid as one about experience trumping all else, so to speak, while Bernie Sanders is shifting the conversation to real and supposed Wall Street fat cats being the source of all of America's ills, a topic very much in his wheelhouse.

Rarely, so far, has the conversation been about who truly represents the ideals of the Democratic Party, and what that Party line actually stands for.

On the other side of the aisle, there are the Republicans.

There is Ted Cruz, who has veered from his policy talking points to framing himself as the only viable alternative to Donald Trump. There is John Kasich, who has turned the conversation from gabbing about his lacklustre irrelevant start in the race to being the only politician in the GOP field who has managed to stay relatively above the fray, and then there is Donald Trump.

Well, Mr. Trump attempts to change the conversation every day to keep the talking heads yakking, whether it is setting the rights of women back forty years, deporting all immigrants unwilling to put a ring on it, and planting the seeds of nuclear annihilation.

Essentially, Donald Trump is that inexperienced intern at the Chef Boyardee plant throwing just about everything at the wall to see what sticks.

Now in Aurora, the groundwork is being laid for another conversational shift.

Over the past five or six years, barely a month has gone by without the word 'hotel' passing the lips of a local politician, business person, or community organizer. It was a buzzword when the only game in Town was falling into a steady state of disrepair. It was a buzzword when it ultimately closed up shop. It continued to be a buzzword during the last municipal election when candidates were vying to be the white knight for many a white sale looking to furnish a hotel that is barely a dot on the horizon.

Now, it is a buzzword once again as politicians saddle up these horses which, although not quite dead, are gasping for breath.

'Let's have a conversation,' said Councillor Michael Thompson at last week's Council meeting regarding the ongoing battle Mayor Geoff Dawe is having at the Region to have the upper tier re-think their development charge strategy as it relates to future hotel developments.

The Mayor's recent comments on the situation, Councillor Thompson argued, had put out a 'negative message' when it comes to Aurora and the hotel industry.

'I would much rather have a conversation around this table and change the narrative to be a more positive one whereby Aurora is willing to work with the local hotel community and try and figure it out,' he concluded.

It is a noble sentiment, but sometimes, no matter how hard you try, the conversation won't budge.

We have heard time and again the hotel development charges are seen as a significant hurdle for the hotel industry. All conversations seem to loop back to that particular point. In this case, it might be better to draw a line under the conversation already underway before changing direction mid-sentence bound for the same destination.

As far as conversations go, development charges might be a watered-down flavourless sauce, but the sauce should be sopped up before moving onto dessert.