

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-frozen-food-epiphany>

Al Ramadan of Play Bigger Advisors discusses how Clarence Birdseye of frozen-foods fame perfectly embodies the “three pillars of enduring companies” – product design, company design and category design. Inspired by fishing Eskimos, Birdseye realized vegetables could be kept fresh by the same process. He then developed messaging and the necessary business relationships to ensure his company’s success.



## Transcript

- And one of our favorite category designers is a fellow by the name of Clarence Birdseye and Clarence was born in the '20s in the United States and in his earlier years, he spent time up in the northern states and he had this observation, which was the eskimos would fish.. They would bring the fish out of the water, drop it onto the ice, ice water bond, flash freezes the fish and then they would take those fish back to their homes and they would consume those fish over a period of a week, a month or a year.. So long as it stayed frozen when you defrosted, if you liked that fish, it was as fresh as it was when it started.. So that was his insight.. That was the thing that he kinda figured out and of course in the '20s, there wasn't the plethora of opportunity.. You have to have fresh foods as we do today.. If you live near a farm, you probably went to a market and that was cool.. You got fresh foods.. If you didn't, you probably ate canned foods.. And so Clarence kind of railed this whole point of view around fresh and he got out and started to talk about the value of fresh foods and if you think about it, that was the product side..

That was the product design piece.. He invented flash freezing.. It was related to vegetables in that particular case and he then had to convince all the trucking companies in the United States that they needed to take this frozen food from the farms essentially to the supermarkets and then he also had to convince the supermarkets that they should put freezers in and of course we walk into the supermarkets today and this is what we see.. This is called a frozen food aisle.. In it you have frozen vegetables, which is what Birdseye is famous for, but you've got pretty much everything else and so he was a genius at creating.... Doing product design, company design and category design to the extent that we all now experience it basically 100 years later and there's a plethora of foods that are available and if you look at.... You probably can't read the numbers, but I can just tell you this is.... The lifetime value of this category is probably about a trillion dollars already and so when you become the leader in a particular category, you do create a ton of value...