

PRINTtips

Benjamin Franklin, American Printer

Because we are printing professionals, we are very proud to be part of an industry with a long, distinguished history. From time to time, we like to share a part of printing's history with you as our way of saluting our traditions. We hope you will enjoy this month's look back at America's premier printer, Benjamin Franklin.

Early Years

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston on January 17, 1706. He was the fifteenth child and tenth and last son of his father Josiah. (Seven children were born to Josiah and his first wife; and ten more, including Benjamin, to Josiah and his second wife Abiah Folger.)



Josiah Franklin was a tallow chandler (candle and soap maker) by trade and apprenticed all of his sons to various trades. Josiah apparently intended to train Benjamin for the clergy, so enrolled him in grammar school at the age of eight. This suited Benjamin as he had already learned to read and showed a love of books. However, after only one year of grammar school, Josiah realized he would not be able to afford the college education that would be required for Benjamin to enter the clergy. So at the age of ten, Benjamin was taken out of school and joined his father in business, taking the place of his older brother John who had married and moved to Rhode Island.

Benjamin disliked being a chandler. Fearing that his son might run away to sea, Josiah investigated several other trades, including a cutler. Eventually, and in part due to Benjamin's fondness for books, Josiah decided that his son should be a printer even though one older son, James, was already in that profession.

In 1718, at the age of 12, Benjamin was apprenticed to his older brother James who had recently returned from England with a printing press and fonts to set up business in Boston.

This gave Benjamin access to books and magazines that James brought from London as well as broadsides and other

publications through his acquaintance with other apprentices.

Benjamin's apprenticeship included composing (setting type), operating the press and selling printing in Boston's streets. In his free time, Benjamin furthered his education by reading and teaching himself to write. He also became a vegetarian so that he could spend part of his food allowance on books.

In 1721 James Franklin started Boston's first newspaper containing local news. Called *The New England Courant*, it contained articles, advertisements, ships' schedules and opinion pieces written by James's friends. Benjamin wanted to write for the paper, too, but knew that James would object. So he developed a fictional widow, Silence Dogood, and submitted articles to *The New England Courant* written by her. Widow Dogood was very critical of contemporary society, especially the way women were treated. After writing 16 letters, Benjamin confessed, to the chagrin of his brother James.

The New England Courant was written with a liberal bias that frequently angered the colonial authorities. In 1723, James was imprisoned for publishing his controversial views on small pox inoculation and the clergy; during his month in jail, Benjamin published the newspaper. One of the

conditions of James's release was that he no longer publish the newspaper. To get around this restriction, James forgave the balance of Benjamin's indenture so that the newspaper could be published under Benjamin's name. This continued for several months until Benjamin tired of his brother's harassment and occasional beatings and resolved to leave James's employ.

James used his influence with Boston printers to prevent Benjamin from obtaining employment in that town. Benjamin first tried New York's only printer (who did not need help), then New Jersey and finally found work in Philadelphia as an apprentice printer. His work caught the eye of the governor of Pennsylvania who promised to set Benjamin up in business as a printer if he would go to London to buy fonts and printing equipment. In 1724 at the age of 18, Benjamin departed for London but soon found that the governor's promised letters of credit were worthless. With characteristic resourcefulness, Benjamin gained employment first for Samuel Palmer and later for John Watts — two of London's foremost printing houses.

In 1726, Benjamin Franklin returned to Philadelphia and briefly worked as a bookkeeper and shopkeeper for Thomas Denman, a merchant who loaned him money to return home from England. In 1727 Franklin resumed his trade as a printer and also helped establish the Junto, a society of young men who met together on Friday evenings for "self-improvement, study, mutual aid and conviviality." The Junto later became the American Philosophical Society.

In 1728 Franklin established a printing partnership in Philadelphia with Hugh Meredith and rented a building that served as both print shop and home. In 1729 he bought a dull, poorly edited weekly newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and transformed it into an entertaining and informative publication. In 1730, when he was 24, Franklin bought out Hugh Meredith, married his childhood sweetheart Deborah Read and was elected the official printer for Pennsylvania. His duties included printing money, laws and documents for the colony.

The Entrepreneurial Years

An enterprising and entrepreneurial man, Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* soon became the most successful newspaper in the colonies. Franklin not only printed the paper, he often contributed articles written under aliases. His newspaper printed the first political cartoon, authored by Franklin himself.

Besides the print shop, Franklin and his wife ran a general store and a bookstore. In 1731 Franklin founded what was probably the first public library in America, later chartered (in 1742) as the Philadelphia Library. He also sponsored his journeyman Thomas Whitmarsh as his printing partner in South Carolina. Franklin bought the printing press and type in return for a share of profits for six years. In effect, he became the first printing franchiser. Eventually Franklin helped establish newspapers in New York, Connecticut and two islands in the West Indies.

In 1733 Franklin began publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack* using the pen name Richard Saunders. (An almanac was an

annual publication containing weather reports, recipes, predictions and homilies.) Franklin's almanac was distinguished by its lively writing and witty aphorisms, many of which remain widely quoted today.

In 1736 Franklin became clerk of the Pennsylvania General Assembly and organized Philadelphia's Union Fire Company; in 1737 he was appointed deputy postmaster of Philadelphia. He also introduced methods to improve street paving and lighting. Later he became the Public Printer for Delaware, New Jersey and Maryland, responsible for printing currency.

Franklin's business interests – print shop, general store, newspaper and *Poor Richard's Almanack* – prospered during the 1730s and 1740s. By 1749, having become a millionaire at the age of 42, he sold his printing business and retired in order to devote himself to science and civic leadership. Eventually, of course, he became a diplomat of the American Revolution and a framer of the Constitution. His common sense, wisdom, wit, industry and diplomacy allowed him to serve his country with great distinction. When he died at in April of 1790 at the age of 84, 20,000 people attended his funeral.

Benjamin Franklin, American Printer

Despite all his accomplishments, Franklin himself wished most to be remembered as a printer. He took much pride in his trade and used it to spread his opinions throughout the colonies. A man of great influence who was not afraid to rebel against authority when necessary, Franklin deserves his reputation as America's foremost printer.

a vocabulary of the *worlds*

Since our issue this month features Benjamin Franklin, it seems appropriate to publish some of his witty aphorisms, many of which appeared in *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

- They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.
- After three days men grow weary, of a wench, a guest, and weather rainy.
- Necessity never made a good bargain.
- Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.
- Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.
- 'Tis easy to see, hard to foresee.
- What is serving God? 'Tis doing Good to Man.
- He that lieth down with Dogs, shall rise up with Fleas.
- The worst wheel of a cart makes the most noise.
- He that speaks ill of the Mare, will buy her.
- If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worthy reading, or do things worth the writing.
- Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.
- He that riseth late, must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night.
- Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.
- When the well's dry, we know the worth of water.
- Little strokes, fell great oaks.
- The cat in gloves catches no mice.
- Fish and visitors stink after three days.
- Who has deceiv'd thee so oft as thy self?
- To err is human, to repent divine; to persist devilish.
- Well done is better than well said.
- Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee.
- He that drinks his Cyder alone, let him catch his Horse alone.
- He that hath a Trade, hath an Estate.
- What you seem to be, be really.
- Tim was so learned, that he could name a horse in nine Languages; So ignorant, that he bought a cow to ride on.
- Love your Neighbour; yet don't pull down your Hedge.
- People who are wrapped up in themselves make small packages.
- He that speaks much, is much mistaken.
- Glass, China, and Reputation, are easily crack'd, and never well mended.
- The sleeping Fox catches no poultry. Up! up!
- Silence is not always a Sign of Wisdom, but Babbling is ever a folly.
- A good example is the best sermon.
- The end of Passion is the beginning of Repentance.
- He that would Fish, must venture his bait.
- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
- A little neglect may breed great mischief...for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost.
- Courteous Reader, Remember that time is money. (*Advice to a Young Tradesman*)
- We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately. (*At the signing of the Declaration of Independence*)
- There was never a good war or a bad peace. (*Letter to Josiah Quincy, September 11, 1783*)
- Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in the world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes. (*Letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy, November 13, 1789*)

Benjamin Franklin was a master of opportunity. Take a page from his book and use press releases for promoting your business.

Has your company had a newsworthy event happen recently? Was there a move to a larger facility or purchase of a new piece of equipment? Did your company make an acquisition or promote someone to a new position of responsibility? These and similar kinds of happenings may be of interest to your customers or your industry. To simultaneously get the word out and promote your business, try using a press release.

Press releases are issued in many forms. If you read trade magazines published

for your industry, you certainly have seen press releases even if you haven't recognized them.

If you would like to try your hand at this free publicity for your company, begin by compiling a list of publications you'd like to appear in. These may include your local newspaper if it has a business section; specialty publications and journals serving your local community; and industry trade publications you read regularly. Look at the publication's masthead for information on where to direct a press release.

Next, select a typical publication and read it for style rather than content. You are trying to determine how the publication writes its articles – the

grammatical elements of tense, person and sentence structure. By conforming as closely as you can to the publication's style, you'll minimize the amount of editing that needs to be done and increase your chance of being published.

Issue press releases whenever you have something interesting to report. If you submit regularly, you may be identified by the newspaper staff reporters as a possible industry source for information. Think what a nice feeling it will be to see your product or service in print!

Q. *Surely printing has changed substantially since the days of Benjamin Franklin.*

Can you provide a succinct overview of what goes on in today's print shop?

A. You may be surprised to learn that conceptually, little has changed from Benjamin Franklin's day. What has changed are the tools we use to get the marks on the paper.

Benjamin Franklin's print shop and ours have three functional areas: prepress, press and bindery. His prepress department was where type was set (called composing). Our prepress functions include design, typography, art, photos, halftone screening, scanning, color separations, color correction, imposition, stripping and assembly, platemaking and proofing. In his shop composing functions were performed by apprentices. In our shop these functions are performed by our prepress staff.

Like Benjamin Franklin, the press is where we transfer images to paper. Franklin's pressmen needed great strength to operate their presses. Our press operators use intelligence to precisely position press plates, perform make-ready and control ink coverage, color, registration and speed of impressions.

Benjamin Franklin's bindery operations included bookbinding. Ours include all finishing work such as cutting, folding, trimming, binding, drilling, numbering, stitching and packaging.

If you would like to see what we do in person, call us to arrange a shop tour. We think you'll find our activities very interesting to observe.