



Learning from Ben Franklin's White Paper

By Tedd Campbell

Benjamin Franklin was an innovator extraordinaire. His noteworthy achievements in politics, diplomacy, science, business, technology, music, literature, and other diverse fields bear witness to how effective he was at pushing the envelope.

Ben's inventions have improved the lives of millions—probably billions—since he introduced them more than two centuries ago. These inventions include the lightning rod, bifocal glasses, an odometer for carriages, and the Pennsylvania Fireplace, a forerunner of modern wood-burning stoves. In fact, when I was growing up, we had a Better N' Bens woodstove in our living room.

But Ben Franklin was not only an inventor. He was a technology entrepreneur who actively marketed his innovative products using—believe it or not—white papers (then called pamphlets).

In *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Ben describes what he did to educate the market about his revolutionary new stove:

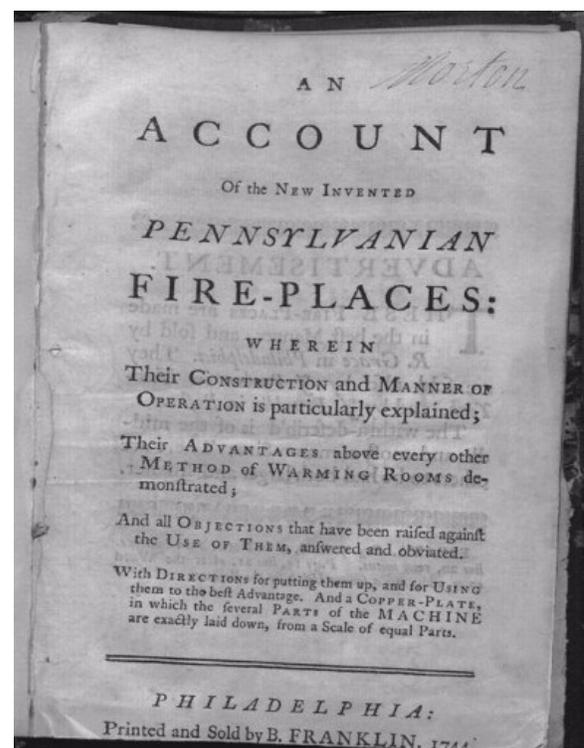
In order of time, I should have mentioned before, that having, in 1742, invented an open stove for the better warming of rooms, and at the same time saving fuel, as the fresh air admitted was warmed in entering, I made a present of the model to Mr. Robert Grace, one of my early friends, who, having an iron-furnace, found the casting of the plates for these stoves a profitable thing, as they were growing in demand.

To promote that demand, I wrote and published a pamphlet, entitled "An Account of the new-

invented Pennsylvania Fireplaces; wherein their Construction and Manner of Operation is particularly explained; their Advantages above every other Method of warming Rooms demonstrated; and all Objections that have been raised against the Use of them answered and obviated," etc.

This pamphlet had a good effect.

When I read Ben's pamphlet, I'm struck by how timeless it is, how much it has in common with the white papers that I develop for my clients. For example, the title page features an abstract,



concisely summing up the contents, and the following page has contact information for buyers.

In the main body of the paper, on page one, Ben immediately identifies his audience (families) and their need to burn wood more efficiently (because it's expensive). On page two, he states the purpose of the "Paper": to introduce his new technology and compare it to the status quo.

The paper goes on to deliver:

- A presentation of basic wood-burning concepts.
- An analysis of the current technology solutions.
- An in-depth discussion of Ben's solution.
- A detailed list of benefits.
- A response to common objections.

At forty pages, Ben's pamphlet is really quite hefty (because he was selling copies, not giving them away). If I were writing about the same subject today, I'd address it in several shorter white papers, separately covering basic concepts, benefits, objections, technology review/comparison, and detailed technical information about the solution.

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That said, Ben gets full marks for persuasiveness. By the last page, I found myself wanting to try one of those newfangled Pennsylvania Fireplaces—exactly what the visionary entrepreneur intended when he sat down at his desk, quill in hand, to write this remarkable white paper in 1744.



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