

Franklin Gothic: from Benton to Berlow

Sans serif, or gothic, typefaces became popular for advertising and promotional work in 19th century America. Their bold letterforms, brassy characteristics and efficient use of space were sought after then, just as they are now. By the time American Type Founders (ATF) was formed in 1892, more than 50 different sans serif faces were offered by the major American type suppliers.

First Franklin Designs

The Franklin Gothic™ typeface was the third in a series of sans serif faces designed after ATF was founded. In the early 1900s, Morris Fuller Benton, who was in charge of typeface development for ATF at the time, began to create the type designs that would influence American type design for more than 40 years. Globe Gothic was his first sans serif design, which was followed shortly thereafter by Alternate Gothic. Around 1902, Franklin Gothic was cut, although it was not released as a font of metal type until 1905.

As he designed Franklin Gothic, Benton was likely influenced by the earlier sans serif designs released in Germany. Berthold had issued the Akzidenz Grotesk® series of typefaces (later known to American printers as “Standard”) in 1898. Akzidenz Grotesk inspired the cutting of Reform Grotesk by the Stempel foundry of Frankfurt in 1903, and the Venus™ series of typefaces by the Bauer foundry, also of Frankfurt, in 1907.

A Small Family

At first, Benton drew only a single roman design for Franklin Gothic. However, this typeface caught the imagination of printers of the time, and ATF was compelled to add more variants to make a small type family. Benton drew a condensed design in 1905 and an extra condensed in 1906. Five years later, Benton finally added an italic to the family, and two years after that a shaded version was offered as the last Benton addition to the Franklin Gothic series.

A large, bold, green letter 'G' is displayed, representing the Franklin Gothic typeface.

18 Point

10 A 21 a

BRIGHTENED
Retiring court

Shelbey Electric
Corporation

GLOBE GOTHIC & FRANKLIN GOTHIC

Franklin Falls from Favor

By the mid 1920s, ATF offered more than 60 sans serif type styles, but new serif typeface families – such as Cheltenham, Garamond, Bodoni and the works of Fred Goudy – began to eclipse the popularity of the sans serif designs. When serifless typefaces became popular again in the 1930s, it was geometric styles such as the Futura®, Spartan® and Kabel® families that picked up the baton – not the earlier 19th century designs.

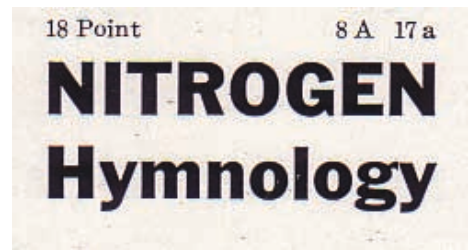
In the 1950s, sans serif typefaces once again became the style of choice among graphic communicators. But the old families were not complete enough for the typographic tastes of the time. In addition, graphic designers were looking for sleek, orderly designs – which the older gothics clearly were not.

European type foundries were the first to address the desires of mid-20th century designers by issuing typeface families such as Univers® and Helvetica®. These rational and relatively conservative designs soon pushed faces such as Franklin Gothic into virtual typographic oblivion. For more than 30 years, Franklin was about as popular as Brussels sprouts.

A New Old Franklin

It was International Typeface Corporation (ITC) that came to Franklin Gothic's rescue. In addition to releasing new and original designs, including the ITC Novarese™ and ITC Benguiat® type families, ITC also developed new versions of old metal typefaces such as Century and Cheltenham. Franklin Gothic was high on the company's wish list for such designs. In 1980, under license from ATF (which was barely in business at this time), ITC commissioned Victor Caruso to create four new weights of Franklin Gothic in roman and italic: book, medium, demi and heavy. This series was followed in 1991 by a suite of 12 condensed and compressed designs drawn by David Berlow.

The ITC Franklin Gothic™ type family retains the personality



FRANKLIN GOTHIC



AKZIDENZ GROTESK

**Futura
Kabel**

FUTURA & LINOTYPE KABEL

**Helvetica
Univers**

HELVETICA & UNIVERS

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ITC FRANKLIN PRO

and character of the original ATF Franklin Gothic, with only a slight increase in x-height and character width to distinguish it from the Benton version. Although newer typeface families such as Helvetica, Univers and Frutiger® have the same basic proportions and attributes as Franklin Gothic, the similarity ends there. Letterforms in Helvetica and comparable designs are fairly homogeneous. Franklin Gothic, on the other hand, retains all the strength and vitality that is typical of late 19th century American sans serif typefaces. Capitals are wide (typographers would call them “square”), lowercase letters share the proportions and letter shapes of serif typefaces, and character stroke weights have a far more obvious thick and thin contrast than most modern sans serif designs. Although somewhat more subtle, weight stress within individual letters also echoes the serif-styled counterparts. For example, the left side of the ‘A’ is lighter than the right, and the first stroke of the ‘M’ is lighter than the other three.

Several lowercase letters are also roman designs transformed into serifless types. The ‘a’ is the typical two-storied design found in a Baskerville or Caslon, and the ‘g’ is of the bowl-and-loop variety also found in most roman types. The ‘t’ has a tail, and the lower diagonal of the ‘k’ attaches almost at the mid-point of the top diagonal. The terminals of character strokes are also cut at a 90-degree angle to the stroke, rather than parallel to the baseline. The result is a design that is square-jawed and strong-armed yet still soft-spoken – sort of the Bruce Springsteen of type.

Two Franklins Merge

ITC Franklin Gothic was originally released as two designs: one for display type and one for text. This was a policy of ITC’s to ensure the best possible typographic output within a wide range of type sizes. But there was a problem early in ITC’s history – it did not manufacture or license fonts. The company created new typeface designs as analog art and licensed the use of the design and trademarked typeface names to companies that made fonts and typesetting equipment. However, most manufacturers did not issue both the display and text versions of the design.

When Adobe commissioned the early digital fonts of ITC Franklin Gothic, the fonts were based on the display design, but characters were modified and spaced so they could also be used at small sizes. The idea was that the same font could be used to set type from tiny six-point text to billboard-size letters. This compro-



FRANKLIN GOTHIC, HELVETICA,
CHELTENHAM



CHARACTERS ARE SIMILAR TO
SERIF DESIGNS



THE TERMINALS IN FRANKLIN
GOTHIC ARE AT 90 DEGREES TO THE
STROKE; THOSE IN UNIVERS ARE
PARALLEL TO THE BASELINE.

ITC Franklin Gothic Medium

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ1234567890
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ1234567890

6 Excellence in typography is the result of nothing more than an attitude. Its appeal comes from the understanding used in its planning; the designer must care. In contemporary advertising the perfect integration of design elements often demands unorthodox typography. It may require the use of compact spacing, minus leading, unusual sizes and weights; whatever is needed to improve appearance and impact. Stating specific principles or guides on the subject of typography is difficult because the principle applying to one job may not fit the next

Alphabet
Length
80

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ1234567890
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ1234567890

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92

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102

26
good
reasons
to use
Franklin
Gothic
Medium

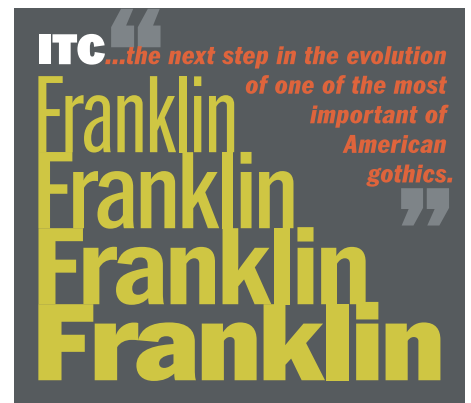
SHOWINGS OF ITC FRANKLIN GOTHIC TEXT AND DISPLAY

mised Franklin Gothic's design such that its performance was hampered at any size. Unfortunately, this multi-purpose Franklin Gothic design became the standard for the digital version of the typeface.

Most graphic designers put up with this less-than-ideal suite of Franklin Gothic designs because it was still considered the best interpretation of the classic 19th century type style. David Berlow, however, could not. As president of Font Bureau, a company that provides off-the-shelf and custom typefaces for the newspaper and magazine industries, he continually received requests for Franklin Gothic fonts from his clients. Berlow knew there could be better versions of the Franklin Gothic design. He also knew that ITC owned the Franklin Gothic brand and the goodwill that accompanied it.

Franklin Evolves

Early in the new millennium, Berlow proposed to ITC that Font Bureau rework the ITC Franklin Gothic family, enlarge it and once again separate it into distinct text and display designs. The new designs would then be available from both ITC and Font Bureau. ITC saw the obvious value in the collaboration, and work began in the first months of 2004.



The project was supposed to end with the release of new text and display designs the following year. But like so many design projects, the venture became more extensive, more complicated, and more time-consuming than originally intended.

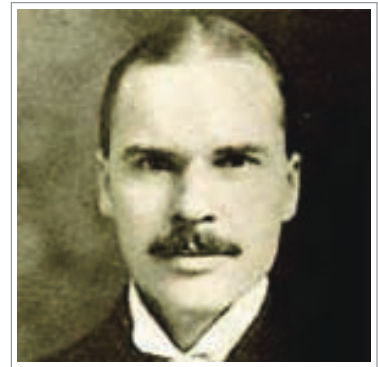
The first phase of the project was finally completed early in 2008. The ITC Franklin Gothic family grew to 48 display designs to create the new ITC Franklin™ type family (sans the Gothic). The designs range from the very willowy thin to the robust ultra – with light, medium, bold and black weights in between. Each weight is also available in narrow, condensed and compressed variants, and each design has a complementary italic. Berlow also added a suite of new biform characters (lowercase characters drawn with the height and weight of capitals).

A Franklin™ Text family is currently under development at Font Bureau. But given how long it took to develop the display designs, neither ITC nor Font Bureau is willing to predict when the new text versions will be available.

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ITC FRANKLIN PRO COMPRESSED



MORRIS FULLER BENTON

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