



The History of BUSINESS CARDS

Calling Cards

Calling cards first surfaced in China in the 15th century, though they weren't seen anywhere else until the 17th century in France.



1400s

Bearer Cards: Legal Documents



Bearer cards first appeared in England and France in the late sixteenth century. They were often made of playing cards written on and signed by gentlemen.

Bearer cards were actually legal documents used to communicate obligation, or convey messages of intent.

Late 1500s

Trade Cards

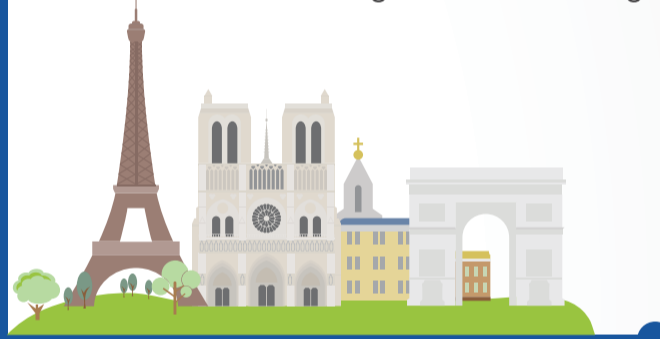
Trade cards served as a form of advertisement for businesses and also included maps with directions on how to reach the establishment.

1600s

Visiting Cards

The cards were collected in a tray served as a catalog of those who had visited the household and of the households to which a reciprocal call was due.

The giving and receiving of cards, then, was tangible evidence of meeting one's social obligations.



Social Cards

Visiting Cards evolved into a more complex system to fulfill social obligations. Cards were presented upon arrival of a guest and presented to the lady of the house for examination.

If the upper right hand corner of the card was folded it indicated that the card's owner had presented the card in person. A card folded in the middle indicated the call was meant for several or all the members of the family. Lettering on the cards (abbreviated from the French for the phrases in question) could include "p.f." for a congratulatory visit or "p.c." for a condolence call. Such details of card etiquette were understood by all members of polite society.



17 and 1800s

1600s

Business Cards

In the United States, business card use became widespread in the 1890s (the so-called age of the Captains of Industry or "robber barons") and the cards achieved their current level of ubiquity by the early 20th century.



1800s



Business Cards Today

Business cards today are a mixture of their past. They generally have both personal and professional contact information.