

# TECHNOLOGY

## CANVA: A PRACTICAL, ACCESSIBLE GRAPHIC DESIGN TOOL

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### *Introduction*

**C**anva is a web-based graphic design tool that allows users to create digital and print images to customize social media pages, enhance blog posts, and create printable marketing materials. With Canva, users create layouts from scratch or start with templates, pre-loaded with thematic fonts, objects, color palettes, text boxes, and platform-specific dimensions. Users have the ability to share designs and collaborate with team members to create visually-appealing marketing materials designed to attract the attention of their target audience.

### *Canva's Features*

**W**ith Canva's drag-and-drop technology, users can create graphic content using templates and pre-formatted layouts. Canva allows users to enter custom size dimensions for their projects, or choose a pre-loaded template for projects such as social media posts, infographics, posters, blog graphics, and other marketing materials. After choosing a template and a layout, users can customize their design by adding icons, shapes, charts, frames, or images. Users can upload their own images or select stock images from Canva's database of customizable graphics.<sup>1</sup> Canva's photo editing

capabilities are similar to popular photo sharing apps and will be familiar to many users. Canva has photo editing tools like cropping, filtering, and resizing. In addition to customizing their project with images, users can add text. Canva offers unrestricted access to hundreds of unique fonts and customizable text templates, which can be resized and recolored. Canva users can also add patterned backgrounds to their projects, and can create graphics with transparent backgrounds for additional functionality.

In addition to the user-friendly graphic design interface, Canva allows users to collaborate with colleagues. Users can share and work on designs with individuals and teams by sharing a link via email. In the team environment, a user may create a team space, which is separate from a user's personal account. In this workspace, team members may access folders and collaborate on designs, and can even "like" and provide feedback on designs. The original creator of a design may designate permission levels—view-only or editing privileges—to collaborators with a Canva account.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Canva users can also collaborate with the greater Canva community by "following" other users and using public member-created designs.

Once projects are ready to be shared, Canva makes it easy to disseminate graphics to a larger audience. Users may allow Canva to access their social media accounts directly and push their graphics to Twitter and Facebook. Us-

ers with a blog or website may embed content with a Canva-generated code, and users can also use the Canva app on an iPhone or iPad in lieu of accessing Canva on a desktop computer. When using Canva on a mobile device, users wishing to post Canva designs to social media channels must have those social media applications installed on their device. Users may also save designs to their photo album and share designs via text, email, or other messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Google Hangouts.<sup>3</sup>

Canva also offers a free learning course called Design Essentials, providing step-by-step tutorials on basic graphic design techniques. Some topics include choosing fonts and colors, arranging layouts, using shapes and icons, branding, enhancing images, and creating strong backgrounds. These tutorials can be a helpful reference when creating designs.

### ***Paid vs. Free Versions of Canva***

**F**ree accounts provide users with access to rich design features and may prove sufficient for casual users. Libraries may also wish to purchase one of two subscription accounts, either Canva for Work or Canva Enterprise. These accounts provide access to additional features that may allow for more efficient workflows and robust design capabilities. Canva for Work is priced at \$12.95 per month or \$119.40 when billed annually, and includes a 30 day free trial. Users interested in a Canva Enterprise account may contact Canva directly.

One of the most prominent features of a paid account is Magic Resize. With this tool users may, for example, create content using a template sized for Facebook, then use Magic Resize to replicate the image for other media platforms. With the free version, users are not able to easily convert images from one template size to another; instead, they must recreate each image for the template size of their choosing. Additionally, with the paid version, users may create a brand. Branding within Canva allows users to create an organization-specific template that can be layered over unique designs. Templates may include logos, slogans, color schemes, or other elements a library wishes to associate with their image.

Canva's free and paid versions also offer different collaboration tools. With a free account, users may create teams of up to ten users. With a Canva for Work account, users may create teams of up to 30 users<sup>4</sup>, while Canva Enterprise accounts allow access for groups larger than 30. Users with paid accounts may designate team members to one of three categories: Administrators, Template Designers, or Members. Users with free accounts may assign members to one of two categories: Members or Administrators. With regard to storage, the free version offers 1GB, while the paid versions offers unlimited storage space.<sup>5</sup> In terms of organization, users with paid accounts can organize designs and photos, while free accounts offer only two folders.

### *Limitations*

While Canva is effective at creating visually-appealing marketing content, it has limitations that can impede productivity and usability. The most significant limitation pertains to users' ability to manipulate objects and fonts. While objects can be resized, they maintain their dimension ratios, meaning that squares may not be converted to rectangles, for example. Furthermore, all text within text boxes must use the same font properties, such as font type, size, and color. Lastly, it is not possible for users to convert one element to another. For example, if a user has inserted a font template, but would like another instead, they would have to insert a new object, recreate the previously-inputted text, and delete the original template.

Users are also limited to how Canva interacts with social media. While users may post content to social media directly from the Canva environment, users may designate only one Facebook account and one Twitter account per Canva account. Therefore, libraries with multiple social media accounts will require multiple corresponding Canva accounts.

### *Conclusion and Considerations for Use*

Canva is an effective, low-cost solution for libraries seeking to create professional-looking materials to market programs and services. Its usability makes it a reasonable solution for libraries wishing to create marketing materials on a limited budget, and

with staff lacking graphic design training and experience. When considering Canva as a graphic design solution, users should consider their needs, including the amount of available staff time, frequency of use, and social media presence.

Canva should be considered as an alternative to Microsoft Publisher or Adobe InDesign. Similar to Publisher and InDesign, Canva users may easily customize templates, graphics, and text. However, Canva's ability to collaborate on the same design, push to social media, and provide access to a free account set it apart. Canva is continually adding new features and improving the overall ability to help users create visually-appealing designs to attract the attention of their target audience.

### ***Endnotes***

1. Users can also purchase stock photos, layouts, and other graphics from Canva if they desire an option outside the free offerings.
2. Canva's collaborative features are currently in beta; users should use caution when concurrently editing a design since changes may not be permanent.
3. Canva offers a mobile application for iOS devices, there is no application available for Android devices, and the company has not indicated that an Android app is being developed.
4. Each team member will incur an addi-

tional monthly fee.

5. In both the free and paid versions, users can download their work and save it on their own computers rather than rely exclusively on Canva, but storing graphics with Canva may be desirable to some teams.

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