



# Local Enterprise Office Kerry

## How to Use Canva to Design Eye-Catching Graphics

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### Course Summary

Prepared by The Marketing Crowd

*This was created with the help of one of our AI colleagues 😊*

## Introduction

This session, delivered by Evan Mangan for Local Enterprise Office Kerry, provided a comprehensive introduction to Canva as a design tool for small business owners. The course ran from 9.30am to 12.30pm, with a 15-minute break at 11am. Participants ranged from complete beginners to those with some prior Canva experience, and the course was structured to cater for all levels. This document captures all the key content covered so you can revisit it at your own pace, use it as a reference as you practise, and apply what you learned directly to your own business.

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## What Canva Is and Why It Matters

Canva is an online graphic design tool built specifically for people who are not professional designers. Where professional designers use tools like Adobe Photoshop — which is complex, expensive and requires significant training — Canva offers an accessible, largely free alternative that allows small business owners to create visually polished graphics for social media, websites, email campaigns, and promotional materials.

Canva has become the dominant tool in this space, replacing earlier alternatives like PicMonkey, BeFunky, and GIMP. What sets it apart is the generosity of its free offering — Canva gives you access to approximately 60–70% of its full feature set at no cost, which is far more than most comparable tools. The remaining 30–40% of features require the Pro subscription, which costs around €12 per month.

Throughout the session, any feature requiring a paid subscription is marked with a small crown icon inside Canva. If you are on the free version and add a paid element to your design, Canva will flag this when you attempt to download the file. You will then be asked to either replace the element or upgrade. Evan noted that in his experience, most people who use Canva regularly and understand its value are happy to pay the monthly fee, particularly given that your images directly influence how customers perceive your business.

A poll at the start of the session revealed that 13% of participants used Canva a lot, 56% used it a little but weren't sure how to get the most from it, and 31% had never used it at all.

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## Designing from Scratch — The Core Skills

The first half of the session focused on building images from a blank canvas. This is the foundation of everything in Canva: you choose a canvas size, add elements to it, and download the result. Once you understand this process, every other feature builds on it naturally.

### Choosing the Right Canvas Size

When creating a new design for social media, Canva offers pre-sized templates: for example, selecting "Social Media" and then "Instagram Post" gives you a canvas set to the correct 4×5 ratio for that format. For Instagram Stories, you would choose a portrait 9×16 canvas. For website images, you need to use the Custom Size option, entering the exact pixel dimensions of the image you want to replace on your site. To find those dimensions, right-click the existing image on your website, save it

to your computer, then hover over it in File Explorer — the pixel dimensions will appear in the tooltip.

### **Adding Images**

You can bring images onto your canvas in two ways. You can upload your own photos by clicking "Uploads" in the left-hand panel and selecting a file from your computer. Once it appears in your uploads library, click it to place it on the canvas. To set it as a full background, right-click and choose "Set Image as Background." Canva also has a stock image library of approximately 10 million images (around 2.5 million of which are free). To access it, scroll down the left-hand panel and click "Photos," then search for what you need.

### **Adding Text**

Evan demonstrated two approaches to adding text. The first, using the basic Heading and Subheading options, is straightforward but tends to look amateur. The better approach is to use Font Combinations, which are professionally curated pairings designed by Canva's in-house graphic designers. To access these, click "Text" in the left panel, then go to "Search Fonts and Combinations" and type a keyword relevant to your design (e.g., "sale," "Christmas," "love"). Canva will return a set of ready-made, styled font combinations. The key point here is that the words in these combinations are just placeholders — you choose them for how they look and then replace the text with your own message.

### **Manipulating Elements**

A core principle of working in Canva is this: to change anything on the canvas, simply click on it. A context menu will appear giving you all the relevant options for that element. For text, this means you can change font, size, colour, alignment, effects, and animations. For images, it opens editing and AI tools. This rule applies universally throughout Canva and was reinforced repeatedly across every exercise.

### **Downloading Your Design**

When you are ready to save your image, click "Share" then "Download." Canva recommends PNG format for designs that involve layering (text on images, logos on backgrounds), though JPEG works perfectly well in practice. You can also download as a PDF if you need to email or print a flyer or poster. Before downloading, rename your design using the title box at the top of the editor — whatever name is in that box becomes your filename.

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## **Working with Colour, Backgrounds, and Layers**

A significant portion of the session covered the mechanics of working with colour and understanding how elements sit on top of one another in a design.

### **Removing Backgrounds**

Evan demonstrated how to remove the white or coloured background from a logo or product image so it sits cleanly on your design background. For Canva Pro users, this is done by clicking an image, going to Edit, and selecting "BG Remover." For those on the free version, the free alternative is

remove.bg — a website where you upload your image, it automatically removes the background, and you download the transparent version. That file is then uploaded into your Canva design.

This is particularly important for logos. A logo placed on a coloured background with its white square still visible looks amateurish. Removing the background of your logo file and using the transparent version makes an immediate and significant improvement to any design.

### Choosing Colours

Evan walked through five ways to choose colours in Canva. You can use one of Canva's default colour swatches, type in a specific colour name using the search box, click the "+" button to open the full colour picker and manually select a hue, use the eyedropper/colour picker tool to sample a colour from within the image, or enter a precise hex code if you have a brand colour guide.

He also introduced gradients — a design technique where one colour graduates into another. Canva has a library of pre-built gradients, but Evan recommended creating your own. The most effective use of gradients is subtle: choose a slightly lighter and darker version of the same colour. This gives designs a polished, professional sheen. Major brands like Vodafone and Sky use this technique extensively. To create a gradient, click on the background colour, select the "+" and switch to "Gradient" mode, then choose your two colours.

### Layers

Every element on a Canva canvas occupies a layer. If you have an image, a logo, and text on the same canvas, they exist in a stacking order — some elements sit on top of others. To change the stacking order, right-click on an element and choose "Layer," then use "Send Forward" or "Send Backward" to reposition it in the stack. This is how designers achieve effects like text appearing behind a person or product in an image. Evan demonstrated this using a photo of a man on a beach — once you extract the person using Magic Grab (see AI Tools below), they become their own layer, and you can slide text behind them.

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## Using Canva Templates

Templates are the fastest route to professional-looking designs. Rather than starting with a blank canvas and building everything from scratch, templates give you a pre-designed layout created by Canva's professional design team, which you then customise with your own content.

To access templates, click "Templates" in the left-hand panel and search by keyword — your business type, the occasion, or the kind of content you want to create. You can also filter results by category (poster, Instagram post, flyer, ticket, etc.) to narrow the results to the format you need.

The critical mindset shift when using templates is this: do not look at the existing images or the existing words. Look at the layout, the design structure, and the style. Everything in a template — the image, the text, the colours, the graphic elements — can be changed. What you are borrowing is the design framework and the professional eye that went into putting it together.

Evan made the point that you should not limit yourself to templates in your own industry. If you run a pharmacy, for example, searching for "fashion" or "jewellery" templates will surface designs that can work just as well once you swap out the images. The design aesthetic is what matters, not the subject matter of the original template.

Roughly 75% of templates are in the paid version; approximately 25% are available free. Free templates are still high quality — the paid subscription significantly expands your options but you can absolutely produce excellent work on the free plan.

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## Canva's AI Tools

The final section before the coffee break and the AI demonstration covered the built-in AI editing tools available within Canva. The majority of these require the Pro subscription.

### AI Image Generation

Canva has an AI image generation feature (found under the Apps/AI hub). You can describe the image you want, choose a style (cinematic, illustration, minimalist, etc.) and an aspect ratio, and Canva will generate options. This is useful when the perfect stock photo simply doesn't exist — for example, "a black and tan Dachshund lying in a dog bed in front of a fire, looking directly at the camera." Paid users can generate up to 500 AI images per month; free users get 25 total. Once you select an image you like, you click "Use in Editor" and it opens in the standard Canva workspace, where you can add your logo, text, and any other elements as normal.

### Magic Eraser

Available under Edit → Tools when you click on an image. Magic Eraser lets you remove unwanted elements from a photo. You can either brush over the thing you want removed, or use the "Click" option to let Canva's AI scan the image and detect objects. Once you select what to erase and confirm, the AI not only removes the element but intelligently fills in the space with what it estimates should be there — concrete, sky, vegetation, etc. You can then brush over any imperfect areas and erase again to refine the result.

### Magic Edit

Also under Edit → Tools. With Magic Edit, you brush over the specific part of an image you want to change, then type a description of the change you want (e.g., "change the colour to green"). The AI edits that element accordingly. This is useful for things like changing the colour of a garment worn by a model, or replacing one element in a scene with another entirely.

### Magic Grab

Magic Grab allows you to extract a person or subject from a photo and make them a moveable layer. When you activate it, Canva scans the image and identifies the main subject. You confirm your selection, and the AI extracts the subject, filling in the background behind them with generated content. The subject then becomes a separate layer you can reposition anywhere on the canvas. As demonstrated, this is how designers achieve the effect of overlapping text and subjects — text sits between the background and the extracted person, creating a layered, professional-looking result.

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## Google Gemini for Image Editing (Free Alternative)

To close the session, Evan demonstrated Google Gemini's image editing capabilities as a free alternative for some of the AI editing tasks that require Canva Pro. Gemini is Google's equivalent of ChatGPT. You access it by searching for "Gemini" in Google.

Within Gemini, you can upload your own image and type a description of what you want to change. Evan showed several examples:

- Uploading a product image and asking Gemini to change the colour of a dress from red to black
- Asking for an alternative angle of the same model wearing the same dress (useful when you have only one supplier photo but need multiple views for a website or Instagram carousel)
- Uploading a photo of a building with crowds of people and asking for all the people to be removed
- Combining your product with a model image: "the man is now holding the Nutri-Grain bar"

The key distinction Evan made is that Gemini is not a replacement for Canva — it is a complement to it. You use Canva for design: layouts, templates, text, branding. You use Gemini (or similar tools) when you need powerful image manipulation — changing colours, removing people, generating alternative views — and then bring the edited image back into Canva to complete your design.

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## Key Takeaways

This session covered a large amount of ground and gave participants a full toolkit for creating professional visual content without a graphic design background. The three areas Evan structured the course around — designing from scratch, using templates, and using AI — are complementary skills that together give you everything you need.

- Canva's free version is genuinely powerful. Most of what you need day-to-day is available without paying anything.
  - The principle "click on it to change it" applies to everything on the canvas. If you can't find a menu, click the element.
  - Font Combinations are one of the fastest ways to make your designs look professional. Use them as your starting point for text.
  - Transparent logos and background removal make an immediate and significant difference to design quality.
  - Templates are a design framework, not a finished product. Change everything — image, text, colour — to make them your own.
  - Gemini is free, powerful, and handles image manipulation tasks that even Canva Pro struggles with.
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## Action Points

1. If you haven't already, go to [canva.com](https://canva.com) and create a free account using your email address.
2. Take your existing logo file and run it through [remove.bg](https://remove.bg) to create a transparent version. Save it to your computer and upload it to your Canva library so it is available in every future design.
3. Create at least one social media image (Instagram 4x5 format) using a Font Combination rather than a basic heading and subheading. Choose a combination relevant to your next promotion.
4. Practise the Custom Size feature: right-click an image on your website, save it, check its pixel dimensions, and create a Canva canvas at exactly that size.
5. Browse the Canva template library using a keyword relevant to your business. Select one template, customise it by replacing the image with your own, changing the text, and adjusting the colours to match your brand.
6. If you search for templates and don't find many in your specific niche, try searching in a related or adjacent category (fashion, jewellery, food, nature) and adapt those designs instead.
7. Try creating a gradient background for one of your designs — use a lighter and a darker shade of the same colour rather than two contrasting colours.
8. Go to [gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com) and explore the image creation and editing features. Try uploading a product photo and asking Gemini to change one element (colour, angle, background).
9. When designing any image that involves text over a photo, practise using layers: extract a subject with Magic Grab (if on Pro) and position your text behind them for a more polished, dimensional result.
10. Download the detailed step-by-step course notes being sent to you by Siobhan — use them alongside this summary as a practical how-to guide when you sit down to design.
11. If you are currently on the free version and find yourself regularly hitting the limits of what's available, consider the €12/month Pro subscription — the background remover, AI editing tools, and vastly expanded template and image library represent strong value for business use.

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