



Local Enterprise Office Kerry

Digital Marketing Programme

Week 3

Course Summary

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Prepared by The Marketing Crowd *with the help of one of our AI colleagues* 😊

Course Summary

Canva: Designing Eye Catching Graphics

Evan opened this section with a poll asking whether participants use Canva to create marketing images and graphics. Results showed a small number said they use it a lot, over half said they use it a little and just under 40% said they had never used it. Evan flagged this explicitly so that more experienced users would have patience with the basics and beginners would not feel behind.

He explained that Canva exists as an easy alternative to professional tools like Photoshop for non designers. Earlier alternatives such as PicMonkey and GIMP were popular before Canva became the dominant tool, now used by around 220 million people. Canva has a free plan and a paid plan (around €12 a month). Anything in Canva marked with a small crown icon is a paid only feature. Free users get roughly 70% of some feature areas and as little as 25% in others, particularly AI powered tools, since those cost Canva more to run. Signing up at canva.com only requires an email address and password, no credit card.

Three ways to use Canva

Evan set out three broad approaches, though the session concentrated on the first two:

1. **Home** (canva.com) is where you design from a blank canvas.
2. **Templates** are professionally designed layouts (Canva has over a million) that can be searched and adapted, swapping in your own images and text.
3. **Canva AI** lets you describe what you want (a logo, a post) and have it generated automatically, similar to asking ChatGPT to design something. This was mentioned but not demonstrated in this session.

From the home screen, options include presentations, social media graphics, a built in (though fairly basic) video editor, printed items like business cards and compliment slips, CVs, invoices, whiteboards, spreadsheets, coded interactive elements, email designs (which can be copied into Mailchimp or MailerLite) and custom sized canvases for websites. Everything you have previously designed or uploaded stays saved in your account, even on the free plan.

Core exercises: building an image from scratch

Evan worked through a series of exercises using a pretend menswear shop, each one introducing something new.

Exercise 1 (Instagram post, 4x5 ratio): Choose Social Media, then Instagram post. Go to Uploads, upload an image from your computer, click it onto the canvas, then right click and choose "set image as background" so it fills the shape perfectly rather than dragging corners manually. To add a logo, upload it the same way (or reuse one already in your library) and resize by dragging a corner. To add text, use the Text menu and "add a heading" then "add a subheading," then click into each text box to bring up a formatting menu allowing font, size,

colour and animation changes. The file name box at the top becomes the downloaded file's name, so it is worth renaming it before exporting (Evan renamed his to something like AutumnSale1). Export via Share then Download, choosing PNG.

Exercise 2 (Instagram story, 9x16 portrait): The same process applies but the canvas shape is taller and narrower. Double clicking an image once it is set as the background reveals the parts of the photo being cropped out, since a wide photo will not fit a tall canvas without losing some content on the sides (and vice versa for a tall photo on a wide canvas). This crop position can be dragged to choose which part of the image is kept.

For this exercise, Evan introduced a better way of adding text than plain headings: searching "Fonts and Combinations" for a relevant word (for example "sale," "Christmas" or "love") to bring up professionally paired font sets that already look polished. These can be edited: double click any word to change it, click to change its colour. Some combinations carry the crown icon and are paid only. If a design element requiring a paid feature is used while on the free plan, Canva will scan it at download and refuse to let it save until it is replaced or you upgrade.

He also demonstrated animating text: click text, choose Animate, and pick effects such as burst, wipe, blur, breathe or wiggle. Adding any moving element turns the file from a static PNG or JPEG into an MP4 video automatically, since a still image format physically cannot move. On Instagram Stories this plays automatically with no visible play button, so most viewers never realise it is technically a video.

Four ways to add eye catching text

Evan consolidated this into four methods:

1. Basic heading and subheading text boxes.
2. Searching Fonts and Combinations by topic keyword (sale, Christmas, love etc).
3. Scrolling the general Font Combinations section (not tied to a search term) and reusing the visual style with different words, for example taking a combination that says "glow" or "feeling cute" and changing the wording to "sale" or "autumn" while keeping the appealing layout.
4. Using Graphics (found under Elements, not Text) which are searchable pre made graphic tags, for example searching "WOW," "Black Friday" or "new." Unlike text boxes, the wording inside a graphic cannot be edited, only its colour, so you must search for the exact phrase you want (searching "30% off" rather than editing a "50% off" graphic). Graphics can be filtered by colour, orientation, whether they are animated, and whether they are free.

Evan gave a real example of using a "new" graphic on an image to promote a new service launch on his own website the night before the session.

Designing for other platforms and using colour

He showed that exactly the same principles apply regardless of the platform: Facebook covers, LinkedIn background photos and any other size all use the same upload, set as background, add logo, add text workflow. Canva pre sizes the canvas correctly for whichever platform you choose.

Evan then covered coloured and gradient backgrounds, explaining that brands like Paddy Power, Vodafone and Sky use bold or gradient colour backgrounds deliberately to stand out in crowded social feeds, since not every design needs to sit on a plain white background.

He explained five ways to choose a colour, all accessed by clicking the element you want to change (background, text or shape) then Background Colour or Text Colour:

1. Default palette (around 20 preset colours, more under "see all").
2. Typing a colour name (for example "brown") to browse all shades of it.
3. The colour wheel accessed via the plus icon, where clicking a base hue then dragging within the square adjusts brightness and tint (top right is the boldest version, moving left lightens toward white, moving down darkens toward black).
4. Typing in an exact hex code if you already know it, for consistency.
5. The colour picker tool (a small eyedropper icon next to the plus), which lets you click anywhere on the canvas, including on an uploaded photo, to sample that exact colour, very useful for matching a background or text colour to a colour already present in a photo.

One participant asked how to find a hex code. Evan's recommendation was to upload the image (a logo, for example) to ChatGPT and simply ask "could you tell me the colour code for this," which extracts and identifies the dominant colour, as an easier alternative to using Canva's colour picker.

He then explained gradients as a second colour type, where two colours blend into each other, giving designs more visual "pop" than a flat colour. Selecting the plus icon within the colour picker and switching to the Gradient tab lets you choose colour one and colour two, then choose a style (left to right, top to bottom, radial from the centre, etc). Evan noted that professional designs (his examples were Paddy Power, Vodafone and Sky) tend to gradient a colour into a slightly different shade of itself rather than combining two unrelated colours.

Removing image backgrounds

Evan ran a poll on how many participants had the paid version of Canva. Results were 40% paying and 60% on the free plan.

For paid users, the BG Remover option (accessed by clicking an image) removes the background in one click. Free users can achieve the same result using remove.bg, a free website requiring no signup: upload the image, it processes automatically, then download and re-upload the transparent version into Canva. Evan noted this takes a few more steps but produces an identical result. He also confirmed, in answer to a question, that ChatGPT

can now remove image backgrounds too (create an image, then ask it to remove the background and make it transparent), though this is slower than remove.bg, and free ChatGPT accounts are limited to two image generations a day (unlimited on paid ChatGPT). He noted Gemini cannot reliably do this yet: it visually mimics a transparent PNG but the transparency does not actually work once placed on another image.

He demonstrated this being important when a logo with a white background is placed onto a coloured background and looks obviously "plonked on," which is fixed by removing the logo's background first.

Brand Kits (paid feature)

Evan explained that Canva Pro users can build a Brand Kit (accessed via a brand icon on the Home screen), which stores logo files, brand colours, gradients, fonts and a "brand voice" description for reuse across every design.

To set one up: either enter your website address and let Canva automatically pull in your logo and colours, or build it manually by uploading your logo (including multiple versions if you have them), letting Canva extract colours from it, then adding further colours and a saved gradient by hex code if desired. Fonts can be uploaded if a designer has supplied you with a specific font file, or set from Canva's existing font library.

For the brand voice field, Evan recommended pasting an example of your own writing into ChatGPT and asking it to describe your writing style and produce a short brand voice description you can paste into Canva, so that any AI generated copy within Canva matches how you actually write. Brand kits can also store photos you use often (of yourself, your premises, your products).

Once set up, the brand kit's logo, colours, gradient and fonts appear directly inside the design tool wherever you would normally choose a colour, font or upload an image, saving you from resetting them each time.

For free plan users who cannot create a brand kit, Evan showed the workaround: simply place your logo (or any brand image) onto the canvas, then when choosing a background or text colour, Canva will offer "photo colors," extracting the colours directly from that image, effectively giving you the same colour matching benefit without a saved kit.

Further design techniques

Evan showed a few extra techniques while designing a mock social media competition post:

- Text boxes can be resized either by dragging a corner (scales everything) or dragging a side handle (extends how many lines of text fit without changing font size).
- The "duplicate page" option (three dot menu on a page thumbnail) lets you create several visual variations of the same design quickly to compare before choosing one, for example testing different shape colours or positions behind a competition callout.

- Elements also include Shapes, which can sit behind text to draw the eye, and can take any of the same five colour choosing methods, including sampling a colour directly from a photo on the canvas.
- The image library (Photos) offers around 10 million images on the paid plan and 2.5 million on free. If Photos does not appear in the left hand menu, it can be found under Apps, and clicking any one photo from there will add Photos permanently to the visible menu.

Templates

After the coffee break, Evan spent extra time on Templates, accessed either from the Home screen or the left hand menu. These are the same designs as the million plus library but fully pre built rather than blank, and Evan's core advice was to search by your type of business (yoga class, dog groomer, menswear, jewellery, etc), then filter by category (Instagram post, story, poster, flyer) and by style (modern, minimalist, collage). Crucially, he advised ignoring the specific images and even the wording used in a template and judging it purely on layout, since every image, colour and word can be replaced. He demonstrated dragging in your own uploaded photo (or a photo from the built in library) in place of the template's photo, deleting or rewriting text boxes, and adjusting the background colour to match your own brand colours.

He specifically addressed the common concern that a niche business "will not have templates," showing that searching an adjacent or entirely different industry (searching "jewellery" while pretending to run a menswear shop) still surfaces layouts that can be fully repurposed once the imagery and text are swapped out. Roughly 70 to 75% of templates require the paid plan, with the remainder free.

Evan closed the Canva portion by encouraging participants to just experiment, noting that once the underlying principles (click to bring up a menu, right click to set background, the five ways to choose colour) are understood, everything else transfers across any shape of canvas or type of design.

Website Tips: Getting a Website Built

A poll showed 69% of participants already have a website and the remaining 31% are planning to get one.

Evan outlined two routes:

Option 1: Hiring a local web designer. Search Google for "web design [county name]." If a prospective designer cannot rank themselves on page one for their own most important search term, that is a warning sign, though some leeway should be given to newer designers who have not yet built up domain authority. Review their previous work through their own site. Evan stressed that a relationship with a web designer is ongoing (unlike a one off trade job), so responsiveness and customer service matter as much as design skill. His strongest recommendation was to post on social media asking your own network for a personally recommended web designer, since a designer built purely for speed and volume (his phrase

was "the Ryanair of web design") may not want to keep servicing small change requests afterwards.

He then showed, building on the previous week's SEO session, how to use ChatGPT to prepare a proper brief before approaching any designer:

- Describe the business and profession to ChatGPT and ask it to explain the field.
- Ask it to act as an SEO expert and list the top 30 search terms potential customers would use.
- Ask it to act as a web designer and recommend the pages the site should have, built around those search terms rather than one page trying to cover everything (echoing the previous week's point that a single page cannot rank well for many different search intents).
- Ask it to draft an email requesting quotes, listing the exact number of pages and a description of each, and specifically asking each designer to quote for SEO separately, so that all quotes can be fairly compared and SEO work is not silently omitted.

Rough cost guidance given: a ten page website might cost in the region of €2,000 to €2,500 or more, a twenty page site around €4,000, and an ecommerce site somewhere between €3,500 and €6,000. Evan's advice was not to choose the cheapest quote, since this is a false economy, and to weight personal recommendations heavily.

Option 2: Self build platforms. Evan explained the concept of a website "operating system" using the analogy of iOS versus Android on phones: in web design there are around seven major systems (WordPress, Joomla, Magento, Wix, Weebly, Squarespace and Shopify). WordPress remains the most widely used, powering around 40% of websites, largely because it requires no coding to update and has over a million plugins that add functionality (analogous to phone apps), for example adding Google Analytics tracking, an image gallery, or turning a basic site into one that sells online courses. However, WordPress sites still need to be built from scratch by a developer.

For those on a tighter budget or just testing an idea, Wix, Weebly and Squarespace offer a fully self service, template based alternative for around €20 to €25 a month. Evan demonstrated Wix: choose a template category matching your business, preview designs, then edit directly in the browser by clicking any element to replace images and text, which he compared directly to editing in Canva. Sites can be published to a free subdomain or connected to your own domain name.

For anyone selling physical products online, Shopify was recommended specifically for ecommerce (around €30 a month), working the same way (choose a template, upload products) but purpose built for online selling.

On security, one participant asked how protected self build platforms are against hacking. Evan's view was that Wix, Weebly, Squarespace and Shopify are generally more secure than a self hosted WordPress site, because the platform itself maintains security across all sites it

hosts, whereas WordPress relies on individual plugins being kept updated, which hackers scan for automatically via bots hunting known vulnerabilities. His key advice regardless of platform: always know who holds your backup (the designer or the hosting company) so a hacked or broken site can be restored quickly.

Finally, Evan recommended [Fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com) for finding freelancers, whether for a full web design job or something narrow like fixing website speed. His advice was to filter by star rating and review volume, favouring freelancers with high review counts and high average ratings (he gave the example of comparing one freelancer with 170 reviews averaging 4.4 stars against another with 242 reviews averaging 4.9).

Turning Website Traffic into Inquiries and Sales

Evan reframed the website as the centre of all digital marketing activity, the "sales environment" you fully control, while platforms like Google, Facebook and Instagram exist purely to drive discovery and traffic toward it. Every product or service should have its own page including features, benefits, ideally a video, testimonials and a clear call to action prompting the next step (buy now, request a callback, etc).

He introduced conversion rate: the percentage of visitors who go on to inquire or purchase. Benchmark figures given were around 2% for four star Irish hotel bookings, 1 to 3% for ecommerce selling straightforward products like handbags or shoes (3% considered a strong result), and as low as 0.5% or even 0.1% for some businesses he had worked with, meaning a 0.1% site needs around 1,000 visitors on average per sale. He contrasted this with physical retail, where 20 to 30% of shop visitors typically buy something, explaining that online shoppers behave completely differently: they compare across multiple sites rather than committing to the first one they land on, since doing so costs nothing but a few extra clicks.

Two further stats reinforced this: around 80% of website traffic is still at the research stage rather than ready to buy, and roughly 70% of traffic arrives via search, where people typically check three or four results rather than only one. The practical implication is that your site is almost always being directly compared against competitors in the same browsing session.

Evan split the response into two goals: increasing engagement, then increasing conversion.

Increasing engagement

- **Avoid frustrating visitors first.** Referencing a Meta study of a million Facebook linked pages from the previous week's session, pages taking more than four seconds to load lose 40% of visitors before they even engage. He again recommended GTmetrix (covered the previous week) for checking page speed.
- **The headline is the first thing scanned**, and Google treats it as the clearest signal of what a page is about. Evan noted he frequently reviews sites in his one to one sessions that have no clear headline at all.
- To write an effective headline, Evan demonstrated a two step ChatGPT process using an audience example of focusing training aimed at social workers (raised live by a

participant): first ask ChatGPT, acting as a marketing expert, for the three main things that specific audience looks for in the service; then ask it, acting as a web copywriter, to produce several headline options that both include the core search phrase (tying back to the previous week's SEO session) and speak directly to those underlying benefits, rather than a plain, keyword only phrase.

- **Establishing credibility and trust immediately** matters because studies show people only buy from businesses they trust. Tactics covered: displaying media coverage logos or a "as featured in" banner (which can be designed in Canva); using ChatGPT to get PR guidance, including drafting press releases and identifying journalists to contact; and converting raw business facts into concrete, credible statistics, illustrated with a driving instructor client who reframed her twenty years of experience as "over 24,000 hours of driving lessons and a 90% pass rate," and a contrasting example of a week old startup that repeatedly emphasised the 35 years of industry experience its founders personally held. Evan's own site uses "20,000 Irish companies have attended our courses, delivered for 12 local enterprise offices" as an example of combining two credibility stats in one line, linked through to a page with further detail. A video on the page also increases both engagement and perceived trust.
- **Encouraging browsing** once trust is established, through image links, text links and a clear, well structured navigation menu, so visitors explore multiple pages rather than leaving after one.

Increasing conversion

- **Offers** make visitors more likely to act. Evan acknowledged offers will not suit every business (using a participant's specialist social work training audience as an example of where they might not naturally fit) but recommended asking ChatGPT whether and how offers could work even for a seemingly unlikely business type, using a veterinary practice as an example (ChatGPT suggested new client welcome packages and preventative healthcare bundles as a more suitable style of offer than a straight discount). He advised running short, time limited offers (two to four days) rather than month long ones, since a long deadline removes urgency and lets visitors postpone deciding indefinitely.
- **Scarcity** works alongside offers, for example limited spaces remaining on a course booking page (Evan noted the local enterprise office's own booking system uses this and sees bookings accelerate once remaining spaces are shown) or [Booking.com's](#) "sold three times today, one room left at this price" messaging. He suggested asking ChatGPT how scarcity might be adapted for a business where it does not obviously apply, for example offering a bonus only to the first set number of orders.
- **Testimonials and reviews** reduce doubt at the final decision point. Evan gave an example from his one to one client work: a boat trip business with an attractive website and around 300 five star TripAdvisor reviews, but the reviews were only linked from a small, easily missed link at the bottom of the site rather than being

visible on the pages people actually landed on. His advice was to create a dedicated testimonials page in the main navigation menu and also place relevant reviews directly on the specific product or service page they relate to, so a page selling one particular training course, for example, shows reviews from people who actually took that course. The tool he recommended for pulling reviews automatically from multiple platforms (Google, Facebook, TripAdvisor, [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com)) into a website widget is trustindex.io, priced around €60 a month with a free trial, offering several widget formats (slider, badge, button, floating, frame or grid).

Evan closed the session summarising the course's progress so far (AI tools, SEO and being found on Google, Canva design, and this session's website and conversion tips) and previewing next week's session on Facebook as a free marketing tool, including how social algorithms currently work, ahead of Instagram in week five and TikTok and video editing in week six.

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