Course Summary

How to create eye-catching images using Canva

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

Course Overview

The Three Ways to Use Canva

Evan structured the session around three ways of working in Canva:

1. **Designing from scratch** on a blank canvas, starting from Home. This covered the fundamentals and took up most of the morning.

2. **Templates**, which are designs created by Canva's professional graphic designers. There are over a million to search through and adapt.

3. **Canva AI**, which works like a ChatGPT for design. You describe what you want and it designs it for you.

Evan's point was that once you understand how to design from scratch, templates become very easy. A template is simply a canvas a professional has already put things on.

Free versus paid. Canva has a free version and a paid version (€12 a month). Anything marked with a small crown is only available on the paid version. The free version still gives you plenty of good material, just not everything. In Evan's experience, people who understand what the paid version includes tend to see it as very good value. To sign up for free, go to Canva.com, click **Sign up** in the top right and create an account with an email address.

Finding Your Way Around Home

Home is where you design from scratch, and it asks "What will you design today?" Options include:

- **Presentations**, as a more eye-catching alternative to PowerPoint.

- **Social media**, where most of the session was spent.

- **Video**. Canva has an inbuilt video editor and much of it is free. Evan finds it clunky, though, and recommends CapCut or the Edits app from Meta as better video editors.

- **Print** products such as flyers, invitations and posters, which Canva will print and post to you for a fee.

- **Docs** such as invoices or CVs, **Whiteboard** for brainstorming and **Sheets** as a more eye-catching alternative to Excel.

- **Code**, where you describe what you want and the AI programs it for you. One example is an interactive map for your website showing places within a set distance, with a description when people click on each one.

- **Websites**. In Evan's opinion these are not good enough for businesses, since you need multiple product and service pages and SEO tagging such as meta titles and headlines. They are fine for something simple like a wedding website.

- **Email**. You can design an email, copy the HTML code and bring it into MailChimp or MailerLite.
- **Photo editor**, where you upload a photo and edit it.
- **Custom size**, for when you need a canvas that isn't a predefined size, such as a website image.

Whatever you learn for social media applies everywhere else, because the fundamentals are the same.

Choosing the Right Canvas Size

- **Instagram post 4x5** (1080 by 1350 pixels) is slightly taller than it is wide. It fits the Instagram feed and grid perfectly, and it also works for Facebook and LinkedIn posts. Evan uses it for posts on every social network, which saves designing different sizes for each one.
- **Instagram story 9x16** is a tall portrait format. It works for Instagram and Facebook stories, and also for Instagram Reel covers.
- **LinkedIn background photo** gives you a canvas that fits the header image on your LinkedIn profile exactly.
- **Facebook cover** gives you a canvas that fits your Facebook page header exactly.

To find these, go to **social media**, choose the network, then choose the format.

The Basics: Your First Design

Evan used a pretend menswear shop with a winter sale on jackets throughout the early exercises.

Two menus on the left. Home has one menu on the left. Once you open a canvas, a different menu appears.

Uploading. Everything in Canva happens on Canva's website, so your images must be uploaded first. Click **Uploads** then **Upload files** and choose the image. Your uploads library holds everything you have ever uploaded, even on the free version. You can also search within your uploads, for example for "beach".

Setting a background image. Click the image to add it to the canvas. Rather than dragging the corners, right click and choose **Set image as background**.

Adding a logo. Upload it, click it to add it, then drag it into position and drag a corner to resize.

Adding text. Go to **Text** and click **Title** or **Subtitle**. Double click to change the words.

The key principle: click on it to change it. There is no menu at the top until you click on something. Once you click, a menu appears with options for that item: font, size, colour,

bold, italic, underline, uppercase, alignment, bullet points, animation and more. You can also drag the sides of a text box left or right to spread the text over more lines.

Naming and downloading. The box at the top sets the file name, so rename it from something random like “title” to something meaningful. Then click **Share**, **Download** and **Download** again.

Your Designs Save Automatically

You never need to click save. Canva saves every second, and all your previous designs appear at the bottom of Home. You can reopen any design later and change it, for example turning a winter sale into an autumn sale. To get back to Home, click **Home** or delete everything after Canva.com in the web address. You can tidy designs into folders using the three dots and **Move**.

Four Ways to Add Eye-catching Text

1. **Title and subtitle.** This is the basic way. Evan felt it looks like something done in PowerPoint rather than by a graphic designer.

2. **Search font combinations by topic.** Under **Text**, search fonts and combinations for a topic such as “sale”, “Christmas” or “love”. These combinations were put together by Canva’s designers. Ignore the words in them and judge only the look. “Huge sale” can become “mega sale” and “wild sale” can become “winter sale”. A Christmas combination can become “Gift vouchers now available”.

3. **Browse generic font combinations.** Scroll down under **Text** without searching to find combinations not tied to any topic. Again, ignore the words. If your new words run beyond the box, reduce the font size until they fit.

4. **Graphics.** These live under **Elements**, not under Text. Search for something like “wow” or “Black Friday”. The filter lets you narrow by colour, by static or animated and by free. You can never change the words in a graphic, but you can often change its colours. Click the graphic and, if colours appear in the menu, you can change them. You can also combine a graphic with a font combination, with the graphic drawing the eye to the text.

Downloading: File Types and Compression

- **PNG or JPG** both work on any social network or website. PNG tends to be preferred when you put things on top of an image, such as a logo or text, but it really doesn’t matter. Nobody can look at an image and tell which it is.

- **PDF** is handy when you want to email a design so anyone can double click and read it.

- **Compress** (paid only) makes the file size smaller without making it pixelated or less sharp. Social networks compress images themselves when you upload, so Evan doesn’t bother for social media. He always compresses images for his website and

email, because heavy images slow pages down, can be caught by spam filters and load slowly on poor connections.

Stories, Repositioning Images and Animation

Choosing which part of the image shows. When an image doesn't match the canvas shape, there is extra image hidden outside it. Double click the image to see all of it, then drag it to choose which part shows. Evan showed this with a restaurant photo: a story canvas showed only one chef, but double clicking let him choose whether to show one chef or all four. Don't assume you are stuck with how it first appears.

Animating text. Story text is often animated. Instagram has animations of its own, but Canva's are better. Click the text, click **Animate** and hover over the options to preview them. Evan made "winter" bounce, "sale" stomp and "up to 50% off" wiggle. Click **Play** to preview. There will be no play button on Instagram; this is only in Canva.

Animated designs download as video. Once anything moves, it is no longer an image, so the download is an MP4 video. Viewers won't notice it is a video. It plays automatically and they just see cool text.

Applying It to Any Format

Evan stressed that he wasn't teaching how to create Instagram posts but how to use Canva. Two quick demonstrations made the point:

- **A new Facebook cover** for a pretend restaurant page. He chose the Facebook cover size, set the chefs photo as the background, double clicked to move it into position and added "New menu" text. He then downloaded it and uploaded it under **Edit cover photo** on Facebook.

- **A LinkedIn header** for a pretend art exhibition. He chose the LinkedIn background photo size, positioned the paintings and changed the "wild sale" combination to "Art exhibition now open", making the text smaller to fit.

Coloured Backgrounds and Removing Backgrounds

Evan showed a Paddy Power ad with a cutout photo of a football manager on a green background. Designs like this stand out in a social media feed, where you are competing for attention.

Five ways to choose a solid colour

Click the background, then click **Background colour**:

1. **Default solid colours**, with more available under **See all**.

2. **Search** for a colour, such as "brown".

3. **The plus button.** Choose the main colour on the slider, then move the circle. Top right is the brightest version, top left is white and the bottom is black. Move towards white for lighter and towards black for darker.

4. **A hex code**, if you know your exact colour.

5. **The colour picker** (eyedropper). Click anything on screen to use its colour, for example matching the background to a floor or a colour in a painting.

Gradients

A gradient is two or more colours blending into each other, and graphic designers use them a lot. There are two ways to make one:

- Scroll down to the **default gradient colours**.

- Go to the **plus button**, switch to **Gradient** and set colour one and colour two. Then choose a style under the colours: left to right, top to bottom, corner to corner or centre outwards.

Designers rarely use garish combinations like red into yellow. More often they use a darker and lighter version of the same colour. The Paddy Power ad does this, as do Vodafone and Sky.

Everything about choosing colour applies equally to text colour and shape colour, not just backgrounds.

Removing backgrounds

- **Paid:** click the image and choose **BG Remover**.

- **Free:** go to **remove.bg** (no sign up, login or payment needed). Upload the image, download the transparent version, then upload that to Canva.

Logos on a white background. A common mistake on social media is a logo sitting in a white box on a coloured design. Remove the background from the logo and it looks far better.

Placing a person or product somewhere new

There are two ways to do this:

- **Manually.** Set the new scene (such as a beach) as the background, add the person and remove their background. Use **Flip** then **Horizontal** if they are facing the wrong way.

- **With AI.** Click the image, go to **Edit** and use **BG Generator**. Describe the new background, such as “Irish beach” or “white marble floor” for a pair of shoes. Canva gives you options to choose from.

Brand Kits

A brand kit (paid only) stores your colours, gradients, logos, fonts, brand voice and regularly used photos so they are always to hand. Your brand colours then appear in every colour menu, and the **Brand** option in the design menu holds your logo, colours, fonts and images. If you run more than one business, you can have several brand kits and switch between them. Canva upgraded brand kits significantly recently.

Creating a brand kit

Go to **Home**, then **Brand**, then **Add brand kit**. Evan created one live for Campas Íosagáin:

- **Website scan.** Paste in your web address (he used campas.ie) and Canva scans the site to pull in your logos and colour palette. If you don't have a website, you can upload your logo instead.
- **Colours.** Delete any you don't want and add new ones with the plus. To add a gradient, choose **Gradient**, paste the hex code for each colour, then choose the direction.
- **Fonts.** Upload your own font file if a designer created one for you. Otherwise set a font and size for titles, subtitles and headings. Campas Íosagáin uses Poppins.
- **Photos.** Add images you use regularly.
- **Brand voice.** This tells Canva's AI how to write for you. Evan's method uses ChatGPT. Paste in something you have written (a blog post, emails or social captions) and ask it to analyse and describe the writing style. Then explain you are setting up a Canva brand kit and ask it to write the tone of voice text, either in your name or your organisation's name. Paste the result into the brand kit. The same technique of asking for a description of your style lets ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude write like you.

Gradients with more than two colours

A question came up about using all five colours in a logo's colour strip as a gradient. You can add a third colour and beyond in the gradient tool. Evan's caution was that too many colours can look like a dog's dinner.

Brand colour on the free version

Any image you put on the canvas has its colours offered in the colour menu. Free users can upload their logo, place it on the canvas and then pick the brand colour from it.

Shadows, Shapes and Giving Yourself Options

Making a logo stand out. A purple logo on a purple background faded away. Evan clicked the logo, went to **Edit**, then **Shadows**, then **See all**, and chose the curved corner shadow,

which separated it from the background. Zoom in to check details like this. It is also worth exploring everything under **Edit**: AI tools, filters and shadows.

Competition post. Because training isn't naturally visual, Evan has used a cute dog to catch attention. He removed the dog's white background and added white text about winning 12 months' membership of the Digital Marketing School.

Giving yourself options. When a design feels 99% there, hover over the page at the bottom, click the three dots and choose **Duplicate page**. Change the copy and compare, since it is easier to judge side by side. Evan tried:

- the text inside a jagged circle shape (**Elements**, then **Shapes**) in red
- the same in brand yellow
- the shape in the colour of the dog, picked from the image, which made the whole design look integrated

Next to these, the original looked bland, so he deleted it. You can download all pages and decide later.

Designing a Website Image to an Exact Size

Evan replaced an image on his website with a Christmas "Gift vouchers now available" image for a few weeks, without redesigning the site. It needed to be exactly the same size.

1. **Find the size.** Right click the website image and choose **Save image**. In File Explorer, hover over the file to see its dimensions (640 by 360 pixels in his case).
2. **Make the canvas.** In Canva, go to **Custom size**, enter the dimensions, make sure the unit is pixels (not inches or millimetres) and click **Create new design**.
3. **Use Canva's photo library.** Under **Photos** there are 10 million images on paid and 2.5 million free (without crowns). A life coach might search "sunrise". Evan chose a snowman image. If **Photos** isn't in your menu, go to **Apps**, scroll to **More from Canva** and open it from there. Once you have used it, it will stay in your menu.
4. **Style the text.** He used a Christmas font combination and changed its colour. The colour options were the same as before: defaults, gradients, colours from the image, brand kit or the colour picker (he picked a colour from the snowman).
5. **Try a shape with transparency.** He duplicated the page and put the text in a plain circle, coloured silver from the photo. When the image is already eye-catching , the design should complement it rather than be garish. The circle still looked basic, so he duplicated again, clicked the circle and lowered **Transparency** to around 50 or 60%. This made it look like a bauble or snowflake. Evan encouraged everyone to try text in shapes, then shapes with transparency.
6. **Download one page only.** Click the page, go to **Share** then **Download**, and select just that page. The other versions are kept for the future.

Reusing Designs and Using Frames

Every old design is a template. Rather than starting from scratch, find a similar previous design, click the three dots and choose **Make a copy**. Then delete what you don't need and add what you do. The original is kept.

Uploading several files. Hold down Ctrl to select several files, up to 10 at a time.

Frames. Dropping product photos straight onto a design looks terrible. Instead, go to **Elements** then **Frames**. Think of frames as shapes for images and videos. Options include blobs, circles and a mobile phone. Drag an image into a frame, then double click to adjust it. Evan put two shoe images into blobs and a model photo into a phone frame.

Outlines. Click a frame and choose **Stroke** to add a solid or dotted outline, set its weight and colour it in your brand colour. A frame can also sit partly off the canvas. Once you start using frames, your designs move to the next level.

Templates

Go to **Templates** from the top of Home or the menu on the left. Start by searching, then set the **Category** (poster, Instagram post, story, YouTube thumbnail, Facebook post and so on). A **Style** filter (colourful, illustration, cute, fun, cartoon and others) is also available, though Evan tends to stay with all styles. Around 75% of templates are paid.

Judge the layout, not the content. Ignore the images, colours and words, since you can change all of them. Ask only whether you like the design. Images in templates always sit in frames, so you just drag your own in.

Examples demonstrated:

- **Art exhibition Instagram post.** Evan dragged his paintings into the frames and changed the text, font (Poppins) and date. He also changed the background colour and made a frame he found basic smaller.
- **New arrivals story for menswear.** The template was full of images of women, which didn't matter. He swapped in his own images, changed the background, resized the heading, added his logo with the background removed and added a Black Friday graphic.
- **Election flyer.** He replaced the candidate with his own photo using BG Remover and recoloured everything to party colours.
- **Yoga class post.** He used a beach yoga photo from Canva's library.

Look beyond your own industry. With over a million templates, a niche business is not limited to its own sector. For his menswear shop, Evan searched jewellery templates, liked a layout with 3D phones, put his own images in the frames, swapped the text for his logo and a winter sale combination, deleted what he didn't want and changed the background.

Will my design look like someone else's? A participant in politics raised this concern. Evan agreed it is a reality. To reduce it, look at a template as a better starting point than a blank canvas and ask what you can change to make it different, such as moving things around. Alternatively, use templates purely for inspiration, for example ideas on using frames, and then create something entirely your own.

Canva AI

Earlier this year, Canva announced a fundamental shift from a design platform with some AI tools to an AI platform that lets you design. AI already features throughout Canva, including background removal and the background generator. Evan was also clear that where he believes another tool is better, he will say so.

AI tools when editing an image

Click an image, choose **Edit**, then look under the tools:

- **Upscale.** This turns a low resolution image, such as one sent on WhatsApp, into a high resolution version suitable for a printer. It is very handy.
- **BG Remover.** Evan uses this all the time while designing.
- **Magic Eraser.** Brush over an item, or choose **Element** to let Canva detect items you might erase. Removing a jogger from a proposal photo worked, but Canva added an odd Perspex panel and left a small remnant that needed fixing.
- **Blur.** Blur the whole image or brush over just the areas you want blurred.
- **Magic Edit.** Brush an area and describe the change, for example changing a top to green.
- **Image to video.** This turns an image into a short six second video. Evan said these are not bad.
- **BG Generator.** Covered earlier.

When Gemini or ChatGPT is the better choice

For anything more complicated, Evan uses Gemini or ChatGPT. They have the best image tools on the market. Gemini's image tool is completely free, while ChatGPT allows only three free images a day. In Gemini, click **plus**, choose **Create image**, upload the photo and describe the change.

- **Erasing.** Gemini removed the jogger and dog cleanly. It also handled a far harder request, erasing everyone except the woman in the green jacket, which is messy in Canva.
- **Changing colours.** Gemini changed a red dress to black while keeping the model and fabric exactly the same. Canva doesn't always keep the person the same.

- **Changing angles.** Gemini can show the same model from a side view, from behind or from the ceiling.

Evan still uses Canva's eraser for simple jobs, because it's handy while designing. For anything complicated, he edits in Gemini or ChatGPT, downloads the result and uploads it to Canva.

Magic Layers

Evan uses this tool almost daily. More and more, he has ChatGPT design graphics such as a course cover or a website graphic. Sometimes he likes 95% of the result but doesn't want to go back and forth asking for changes.

1. In Canva, click **plus**, **Upload** the image and choose **Use in a new design** to get a canvas of the exact size.

2. Click the image, go to **Edit** and open all the tools.

3. Choose **Magic Layers**. Canva separates the flat image into its text, images and graphics.

4. Edit the text, move items or delete elements, such as an unwanted icon.

Using Canva AI like ChatGPT

Click **Canva AI** from Home, type a prompt and use the plus to upload an image.

Product photography. Evan uploaded a handbag and asked for it to be carried by a woman in her early 20s walking down a Dublin street and looking into a boutique window, styled like a professional shoot for a high end magazine such as Vogue. The participants confirmed the handbag in the result matched the original. He then tried handcrafted cats placed on a wooden bookshelf in a cozy sitting room, with a candle, fire and cream sofa, and gave Gemini the same prompt. Canva did a very good job. A few months ago Evan would have advised against Canva for this, but now he says it is really good at it.

One annoyance: the microphone option disappeared once an image was attached, which Evan called bad usability. Write your prompt before attaching the image.

From AI image to finished design. Click **Edit design** to open the result as a normal Canva design, then add your logo (with background removed) and text. Your image can come from your own uploads, Canva's library or AI.

Designing a whole post. Evan asked Canva AI for a 4x5 Instagram post promoting beginners' morning yoga classes in purple and silver, with dummy bullet points and an image of someone doing yoga. You could also ask it to use your brand kit colours, or upload your own photo to include yourself. You can follow up with changes. When he asked for the woman to be on the beach, the participants spotted that the original prompt never mentioned a beach, which is a reminder that the AI can only work with what you tell it.

Canva on Your Phone

Install the Canva app from the App Store or Play Store and log in with the same account you use on the desktop.

- **Your designs.** Everything designed on the desktop appears here.
- **Getting desktop designs onto Instagram.** Open the design in the app, tap download to save it to your phone, then create the post in Instagram and select it. This is much easier than downloading on the computer and emailing it to yourself.
- **Designing on the phone.** Everything shown in the session can be done in the app. Choose a category, a blank design or a template, and a size such as Instagram post 4x5. Add images from your phone's gallery or your uploads. There is no right click, so drag the corners instead. Add your logo, add text or font combinations, pinch with two fingers to resize and tap text to animate it. The same principle applies: tap something and the menu changes.

Evan mainly uses the desktop because he finds it three or four times quicker.

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