

# A Comprehensive Product Analysis of Canva

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Motivations

The purpose of writing this product case study will be to develop an in-depth analysis of Canva as a software product, with emphasis on aspects such as user demographics, product psychology, software business models, and product marketing. Overall, it is meant to emulate the style and content of product case studies and analyses published online by industry professionals.

The target audience for this project comprises both professionals actively engaged in the software industry who routinely evaluate apps as part of their working responsibilities, as well as tech enthusiasts seeking to gain a deeper understanding of their favorite sites and platforms.



Figure 1: Canva's logo.

### 1.2 About Canva

Canva is a popular web-based graphic design app with a wide range of built-in features such as templates, images, icons, and typefaces. Designed with novice users in mind, the app serves as a valuable resource for designers of all levels to create professional-quality marketing materials, social media posts, presentations, and more.

Founded in Australia in 2013 as Canvas Chef by Melanie Perkins, Cameron Adams, and Cliff Obrecht, Canva was created with the mission of "empowering everyone in the world to design anything and publish anywhere." In 2023, Canva reported more than 170 million users, up from 100 million in 2022. According to Bloomberg News, 2023 also brought Canva upwards of \$2 billion in annual revenue.

Canva offers several pricing tiers for individuals and teams. The free version, Canva Free, comes with millions of free templates and graphics and 5GB of cloud storage. Users of Canva's paid version, Canva Pro, have access to an expanded suite of features, including 1TB of storage, unlimited templates, and increased export quality. Canva Pro also provides team, enterprising, and educational pricing options.

### 1.3 Canva's Mission

During her time teaching college design courses, founder Melanie Perkins recognized a steep learning curve in design softwares and set out to make them more accessible for beginners. Thus, Canva was built with a mission of democratizing design, and "empowering everyone in the world to design anything." To do so, the team behind Canva hopes to make it the go-to app for designers of all levels and design needs.

## 2 Overview of Features

Canva's success can be largely attributed to its user-friendly features that serve a variety of design needs. Some of the app's key features include:

- **Design assets:** Canva comes with an extensive library of millions of professionally designed templates and graphics for flyers, presentations, print products, social media posts, and more. Designs are highly customizable, allowing users to alter colors, add text, and more.
- **Drag-and-drop editor:** Canva's editing interface is simple to use, with clearly marked sections for adding text, images, and more, as well as functionality allowing users to drag and drop premade designs and icons onto the canvas.
- **Magic Studio:** In October 2023, Canva launched Magic Studio, its suite of AI design tools to enhance the creative process, such as a virtual copywriting assistant and image and video generation from text prompts.
- **Collaboration support:** Similarly to the Google Suite, Canva allows users to share designs with others, leave comments, and work on the same design together in real-time.
- **Branding kits:** Canva's Pro version provides brand kits for marketing teams to create and store standardized assets, such as layouts, logos, fonts, and more.

## 3 Canva's Audience Breakdown

As of 2023, Canva has a user base of more than 170 million monthly users in 190 different countries, with around 16 million Pro users. While Canva's user base attracts professionals, novices, and hobbyists alike from a variety of age groups and backgrounds, it is primarily used by younger adults — 35% of users are 25 to 34 years old, and more than 60% of overall users are under the age of 35. Overall, this diverse range in Canva's audience demographic breakdown reflects its wide-reaching appeal and ability to unite users from all walks of life to begin exploring their creativity and design potential.

### 3.1 Competition

- **Adobe:** Widely considered to be the leader and industry standard in digital media and design creation, Adobe is one of Canva's main competitors. Adobe boasts a wide suite of creative tools for all-in-one editing and designing (Adobe Express), visual design (Illustrator), layout design (InDesign), photo editing (Photoshop), video editing (Premiere Pro), and more. However, one drawback of Adobe's products is their steep learning curve — while reflecting on her inspiration for creating Canva, Melanie Perkins has famously remarked that design softwares often took students an entire semester to even learn to use.
- **Figma:** Figma is geared towards a more technical audience than Canva — professional UI/UX designers creating interfaces and prototypes rather than non-designers aiming to create simple graphics. Similarly to Canva, Figma also offers advanced collaboration tools.
- **Google:** Although Google apps are geared more towards general users rather than designers, products like Jamboard, Slides, and Docs compete directly with Canva's features. Notably, Google also provides robust collaboration support that allows teams to simultaneously work on the same documents, spreadsheets, etc.

### 3.2 User Personas and Stories

In the field of user experience research, a user persona is defined as a representation of a target customer, including their needs, motivations, and goals in using a particular product. Similarly, user stories are first-person descriptions of what a user seeks in a product, and how they aim to use it. Based on Canva's onboarding survey above and my own experiences as a Canva user, the below personas reflect potential Canva users from different backgrounds, who each have unique motivations for using the app.



Figure 2: Image credit: Judith Lopez.

- **The Casual Student:** As a student, I don't have a background in design, but I'm looking for a simple way to create polished designs for class presentations and event promotions on social media. I have a very demanding course load that takes priority over design work, so I don't have the time to learn how to use more advanced software like Adobe Illustrator or InDesign.
- **The Small Business Owner:** As an Etsy shop owner and dog walker, I'm looking for a software that I can use to quickly make eye-catching flyers to promote my small businesses. Since I operate the business on my own, I'm unable to outsource the work to a designer. Like the Casual Student, having a software like Canva would save time for me by eliminating the need to learn more complex design tools.
- **The Marketing Professional:** As a marketing professional, I don't have much experience in using advanced design tools to create designs for my organization, but my team and I use Canva's branding kits to manage graphics and images made by our design team so that we can easily apply our brand assets as we create promotional materials for our company.

The "Casual Student" user persona aligns the closest with not only the experience of my peers at UCSC — particularly those serving in social media management roles for their student organizations or part-time jobs — but also my own, as I have been tasked with making event flyers before as well. For users who identify with these personas and stories, Canva wins out over other design platforms for its ability to quickly create beautiful and personalized designs.

## 4 Canva Task Analysis

The aim of this section is to provide a walkthrough and discussion of common tasks in Canva, plus potential pain points and their resolutions. Here, we analyze the onboarding flow, as well as the design creation and file download processes through a lens of efficiency and user experience.

### 4.1 Onboarding

With only five steps, the onboarding process in Canva is about as straightforward and efficient as it can be. Some things that stood out to me were its simplified onboarding survey and confetti animation upon completion.

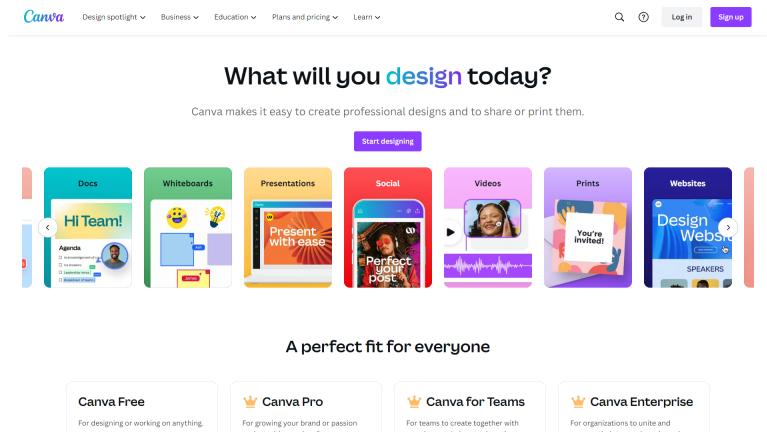


Figure 3: Canva's landing page. Image credit: screenshot

First-time website visitors are taken to Canva's homepage, which provides an overview of the app, including feature spotlights and pricing information.

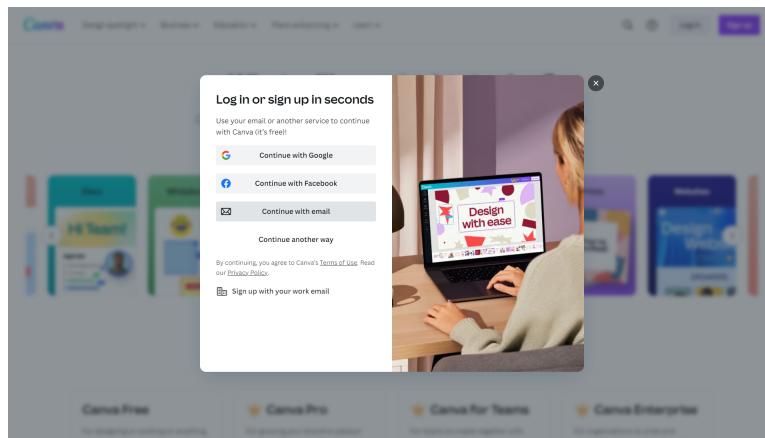


Figure 4: Options for account authentication: Google, Facebook, and email. Image credit: screenshot

From there, the user is given several options to create an account via a single sign-on (SSO) with email or Facebook.

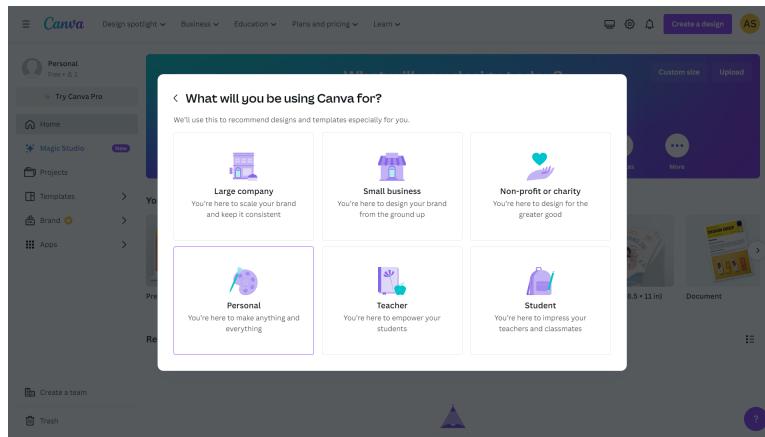


Figure 5: Canva's user onboarding survey. Image credit: screenshot

Canva keeps its onboarding survey short and sweet. A shorter survey proves to be effective in optimizing

user experience and engagement — rather than mincing words with long multiple-choice questions or asking the user to check off options from a exhaustive list of design types they may be interested in (i.e. flyers, presentations, social media posts...), Canva simply prompts the user to select one of six options, essentially user personas aligning with goals and affiliations (as mentioned in Section 3.2), that assist them in providing design recommendations.

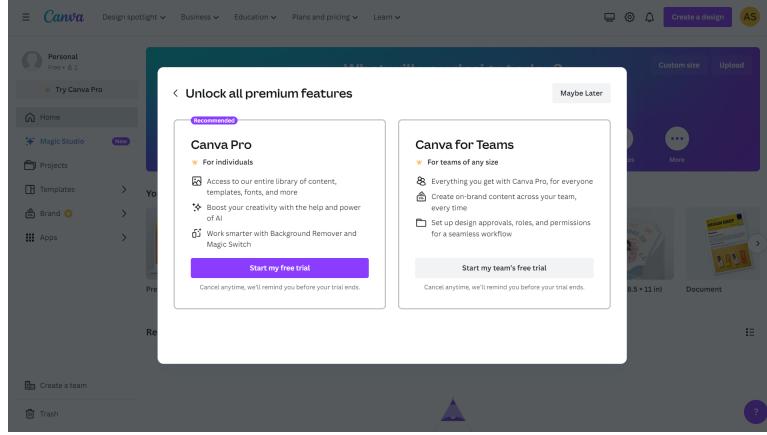


Figure 6: Canva’s landing page. Image credit: screenshot

A small gripe for me, and possibly others seeking to use the free version, was that the option to reject signing up for the premium version was too hidden away in the top right corner. Personally, I would have preferred to see it at the bottom to follow the downward movement of my eyes from the two text boxes. Nevertheless, minimizing the visibility of a button to dismiss content is a surefire way to push users to pay attention to a call to action, such as signing up for Canva Pro, as displayed here.

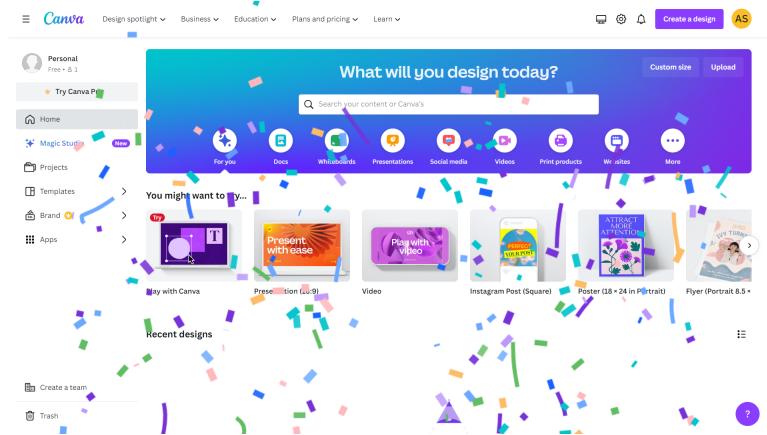


Figure 7: Onboarding complete. Image credit: screenshot

Upon completing the onboarding process and arriving at the user’s personal homepage, Canva greets the user with a shower of brand-colored confetti in blue, purple, green, and yellow. Confetti animations are a popular (and fun!) way to provide users with positive feedback after completing a task that’s significant enough to require additional effort, but does not require a full confirmation page or notification. Adding the confetti animation after the onboarding in particular, rather than a different task like, say, exporting a design, is a strategic move on the part of Canva’s design team: completing the onboarding represents the beginning of a user’s journey in the app. Evoking positive emotions with an animation here can boost user experience, serving as a catalyst for to engage further with the app’s functionalities.

## 4.2 Creating a Design

Clearly, the central focus of Canva revolves around the creation of designs. In my observations, the majority of UCSC students I have met — including myself — tend to use Canva to create promotional materials by editing premade templates. In accordance with this user persona, I'll be keeping my design simple and choosing from an existing flyer template, then filling it in with my own text.

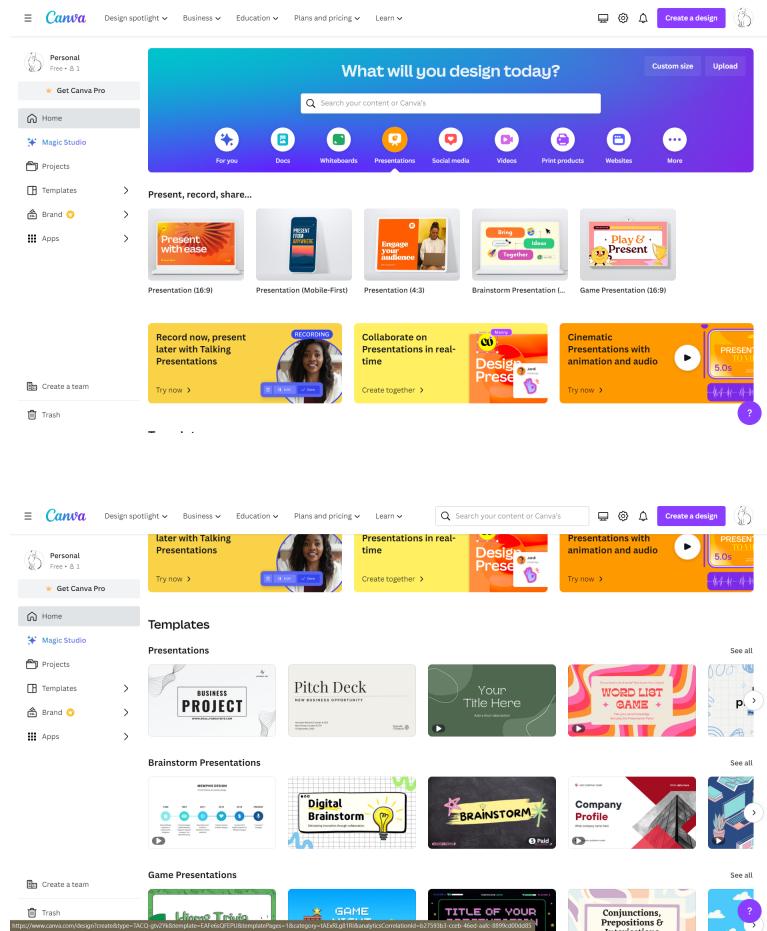


Figure 8: Design suggestions under the "Presentations" category on the Canva homepage. Image credit: screenshot

Canva's templates, located on the homepage, are split into sections including docs, presentations, print products, and a "For You" section containing design recommendations and recently accessed creations. Due to the prominence of the suggested templates, it seems that Canva is pushing for the user to initiate their design process with a premade template, rather than starting from scratch.

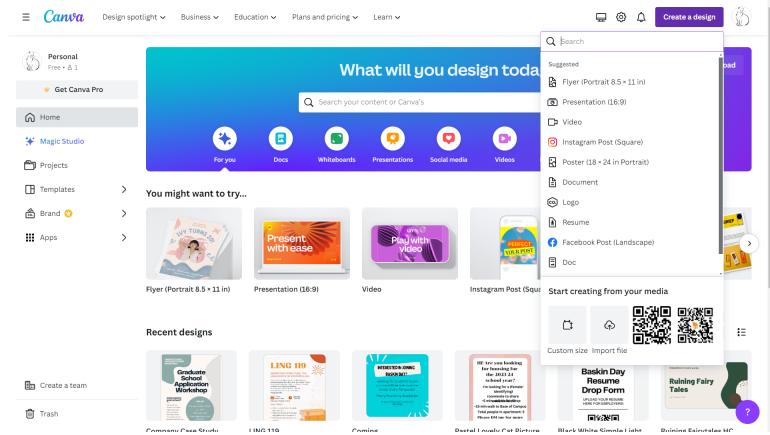


Figure 9: An alternative to selecting a template from the homepage: the "Create a design" button. Image credit: screenshot

I opted to start creating my design using the "Create a design" button, located in the top right-hand corner. I chose the "flyer" option.

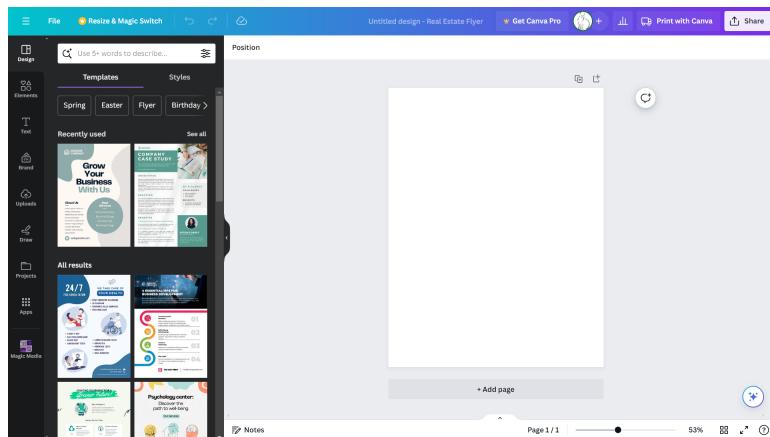


Figure 10:

Canva opens the editor in a new browser tab, with a canvas whose dimensions scale to set measurements for a flyer (8.5 x 11 inches). The sidebar menu, displaying premade designs, is automatically open upon launch.

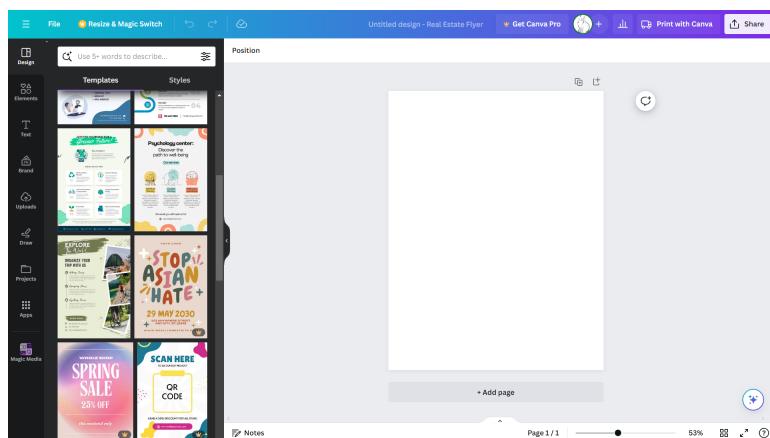


Figure 11: Image credit: screenshot

The sidebar menu is split into sections for accessing premade designs and graphics, adding text, accessing brand kits, uploading image files, drawing, browsing file folders, and configuring third-party app integrations.

For the purposes of this demonstration design, I'll be making an invitation flyer for a fictional friend's twenty-second birthday party. The process of searching for a template was very intuitive, and made simpler by Canva's UI — I was able to filter based on preset criteria like "business event" or "school event" and enter keywords into the search bar. Finally, I chose this green and orange-themed flyer template, displayed in Figure 10.

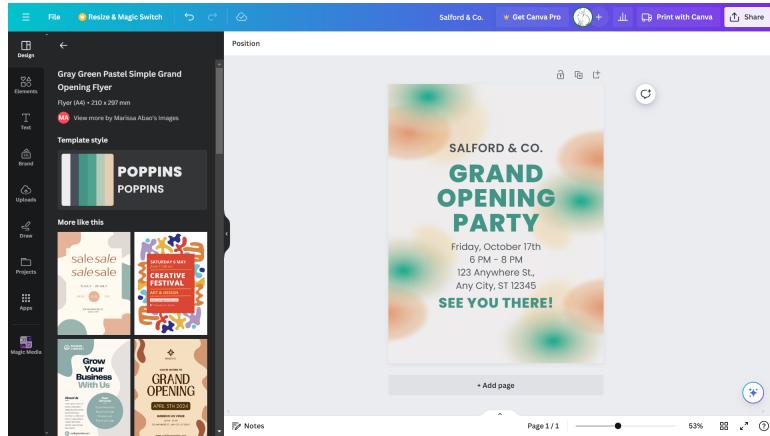


Figure 12: Working template, before edits. Image credit: screenshot

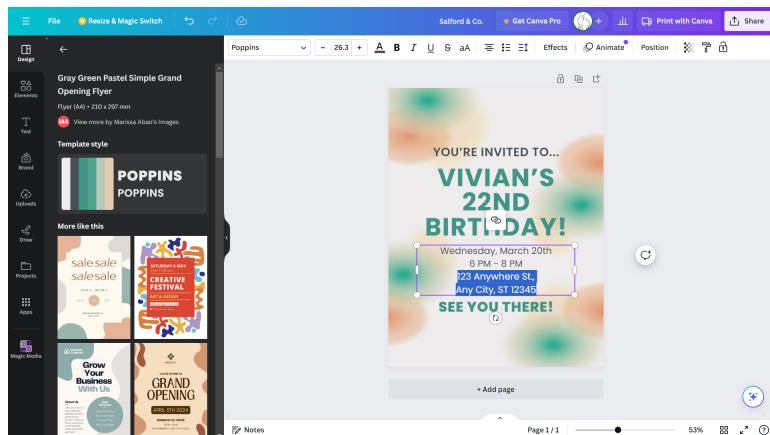


Figure 13: Image credit: screenshot

From there, it was easy to personalize the flyer with my desired text. Editing the text boxes was easy, as well; with typically placed resizing controls, the design of Canva's text boxes if nothing out of the ordinary from other image editing apps.

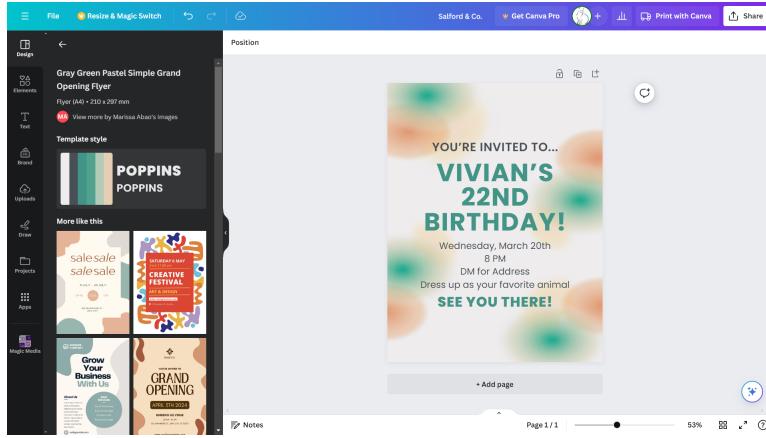


Figure 14: The completed flyer. Image credit: screenshot

### 4.3 Saving and Exporting Your Design

You've finished your design, and it's time to share it with the world. Now what? Here, we walk through and discuss the process of saving and exporting a completed design in Canva using the "Export" menu in the top right corner.

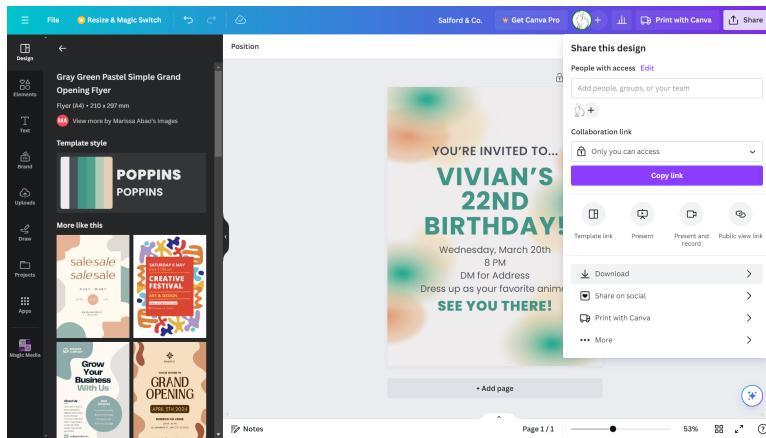


Figure 15: Opening the "Share" menu. Image credit: screenshot

Personally, I disliked that the "Download" button was buried towards the bottom of the "Share" menu. Placing all possible export options in one menu helps in simplifying the amount of potential visual clutter on the top toolbar, but it would save the user a click to place a download button on the toolbar alongside the "Share" button. Additionally, the option to "Print with Canva" appears twice: once in the toolbar, and again in the "Share" menu. Since printing with Canva entails paying to order prints of your design from Canva, the placement of the button seems merely like a ploy to get the user to shell out money. And that's not the only monetary call to action in the toolbar: the "Get Canva Pro" button opens a window with an option to upgrade one's license, which the user could just as easily find on their homepage or in their user account page. Overall, the space occupied by the redundant buttons could have been better occupied by a separate button to download the design.

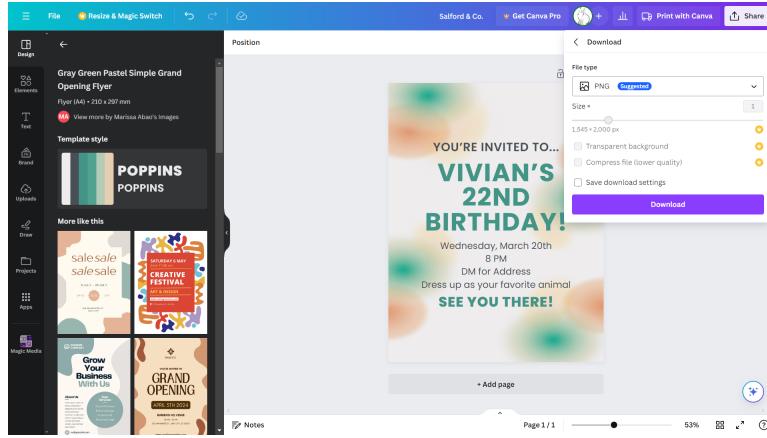


Figure 16: Download options, including filetype and resolution. Image credit: screenshot

The file download type is the only download setting that can be accessed by Canva Free users. Other settings, such as adjusting the file size and erasing the background, are only available to Canva Pro users.

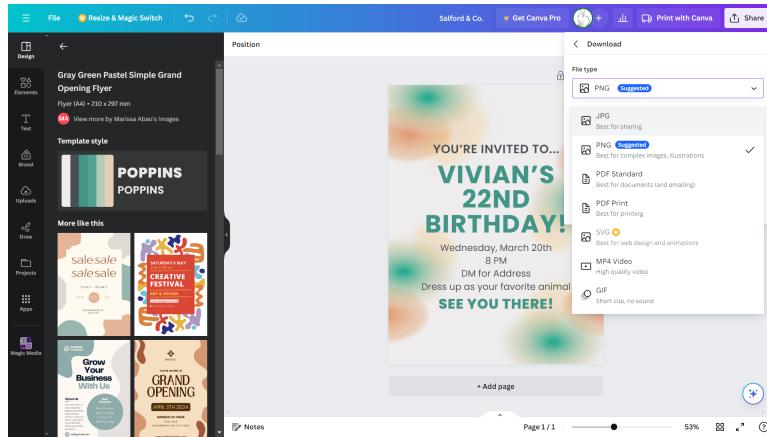


Figure 17: Adjusting the file download type. Canva Free users can choose between downloading their design as a JPG, PNG, PDF, MP4, or GIF. Image credit: screenshot

After changing the filetype from the default PNG to JPG (better for "Vivian" and me to text to our friends), I saved the file to my computer, completing the export process.

## 5 Product Design and User Experience

### 5.1 Color Psychology

The creation of any product, whether digital or physical, requires careful consideration of colors and the moods they evoke, making them instrumental in influencing customers' perceptions. Canva's brand colors are turquoise, blue, and purple, and its logo features a gradient that passes through the three shades.

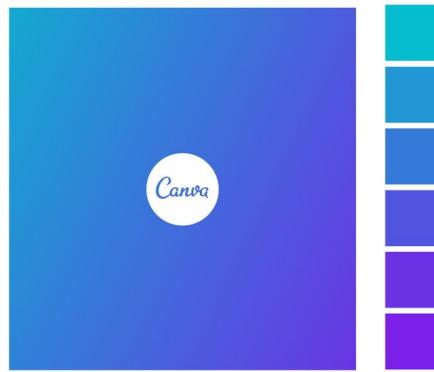


Figure 18: Image credit: Pinterest

Overall, cool colors are typically associated with calmness and tranquility, soothing and relaxing the viewer and bringing to mind objects in nature like water and the sky. Specifically in marketing, cool colors also convey a sense of professionalism and trustworthiness. Blue in particular is associated with trust and security; an overwhelming number of logos of Fortune 500 companies are primarily blue. The gradient with blue, and turquoise and purple, which are both secondary colors containing blue, provides a visually appealing transition that adds depth to Canva's user interfaces.

## 6 Software Business Models

### 6.1 Common Software Business Models

Every business entity operates within a framework defined by its business model, which governs a company's plan for generating revenue, achieving profits, delivering value, and more. In an increasingly technological environment, software companies are tasked with selecting which **software distribution business model** best suits its goals and needs for distributing its product to customers. Consisting of **on-premises**, **cloud**, and **hybrid** models, each software business model has its own unique characteristics.

- **On-premises:** users install and run their product using hardware within their physical premises, such as their own device or a local server.
- **Cloud:** applications and services are accessed remotely via public or private hosting infrastructure on the Internet.
- **Hybrid:** utilizes a combination of on-premises and cloud infrastructures.

Cloud software models are further divided into several more distinct architectures: **software as a service (SaaS)**, **infrastructure as a service (IaaS)**, and **platform as a service (PaaS)**.

- **Software-as-a-service (SaaS):** makes cloud functionalities available to end users over the Internet, via both desktop and mobile applications. Thanks to the ease of use and access of cloud hosting, SaaS has become a popular option for software developers, and the SaaS market has seen billions of dollars in growth throughout recent years. Commonly used examples of SaaS include Google Workspace, Zoom, and Netflix.
- **Infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS):** provides developers with cloud-based infrastructures such as servers, firewalls, and networking, as an alternative to on-premises infrastructure. One notable example of IaaS is Microsoft Azure.
- **Platform-as-a-service (PaaS):** building on IaaS, PaaS offers customers the ability to build and run an application wholly in the cloud.

## 6.2 Canva as an SaaS

Canva is one example of an SaaS application, in which cloud functionalities are delivered to end users over the Internet. Key characteristics of SaaS include:

- **High availability:** As cloud-based softwares accessed over the Internet, SaaS applications can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. In order to use Canva, all a user has to do is provide their credentials on the site via single sign-on (SSO).
- **Subscription-based pricing:** Customers pay a recurring fee to utilize many SaaS applications. Most users start out using Canva's free services, but others opt to use its paid pricing tiers.
- **Automatic updates:** SaaS vendors typically handle the creation and deployment of all updates, eliminating the task of software updates for users. While traditional computer application softwares often prompt users to approve the installation of new features themselves, Canva periodically and automatically adds new updates to its platform. Keeping Canva high-tech and up-to-date by constantly implementing new and cutting-edge technologies, such as Magic Studio's AI functionalities, extends its lifespan and allows it to stay competitive and relevant in the market.
- **Scalability:** SaaS applications are built to scale seamlessly to accommodate user demand. With SaaS, users can easily adjust storage and features as needed, and add or remove other users from licensing plans. Canva's paid version provides upgraded storage capacity (5GB vs. 1TB, respectively) a greater range of design tools and templates compared to the free version, and pricing options to support organizations as well as individuals.

## 6.3 Integration with Other SaaS Tools

One hallmark of SaaS is its integration with other SaaS apps to freely share data for efficient, automated workflows and enhanced productivity. For instance, a project management SaaS platform might connect with a file storage app, making it easy to connect files and optimizing document management in the process. Typically, SaaS integrations are configured with Inbuilt Pathways as a Service (iPaaS), a straightforward, no-code solution that uses preconfigured API pathways to connect apps. Canva has integrated with a large number of other SaaS tools, most of them cloud storage and social media apps:

- **Google Workspace:** Rather than having to download a completed design and then reupload it to Google Drive, users can connect the apps with just a few clicks and save designs there directly.
- **Microsoft PowerPoint:** Canva provides an option for the user to export their design as a .pptx file, which serves to be useful for presentations.
- **WordPress:** An integration between Canva and content management system (CMS)-slash-website builder WordPress allows users to create graphics and other website elements directly in Canva.
- **bobcaat:** Users also have the option to export their design to this freelancers' social media management app. This SaaS integration, not commonly seen in other platforms, is helpful for freelance professionals who need to build their personal brands. In addition to bobcaat, Canva also provides SaaS integrations to a number of lesser-known platforms, such as Canto, Weezago, and Celero.io.

## 6.4 Discussion

Given these characteristics of SaaS, this architecture is decidedly the most suitable to support the deployment of all of Canva's features, such as its Internet availability and integrations with other apps.

# 7 Canva's Marketing Strategies

## 7.1 To Pay or Not to Pay?

Canva's marketing strategy is very much product-led. Like many apps, Canva operates on a freemium model — by offering a basic version for free, first-time users have the opportunity to assess the product for themselves before committing to purchasing the premium version. On top of that, Canva also offers a free

premium trial, which helps to build users' trust in the expanded features before they buy. As new users can be put off of using a product after signing up and completing onboarding only to be prompted for payment information, offering free versions of an application is crucial not only for attracting paying customers, but also preserving a user base.

However, while many freemium apps tend to restrict key functionalities in an effort to entice users to shell out for the paid version (think Spotify Free's disabling of linear playback, or the 40-minute limit on meetings with Zoom Basic), Canva's basic version already offers an expansive range of features. With access to the editor and the free templates and graphics, it's easy for a casual designer to be totally satisfied with just Canva Free.

## 7.2 Canva Learn: Marketing Canva's Mission

Furthermore, in the spirit of empowering everyone to design, Canva publishes lots of instructional content via their platform Canva Learn. This comprehensive free resource comprises a vast collection of blog articles and tutorial videos on topics ranging from creating photo books to designing professional websites to optimizing nonprofit marketing strategies. Putting out a large volume of educational content not only aligns with Canva's mission, but also serves as an effective marketing tactic for beginner designers who may stumble upon the platform after gaining valuable insights from a design article.

## 8 Conclusion

Overall, Canva's strength as a beginner-friendly SaaS design app has proven to be effective as a driver of its success, despite competing with other strong apps like Figma, the Google Workspace, and Adobe apps like Illustrator. There were a few pain points in the otherwise very strong user experience, which were minor enough to be fixed by simply adjusting button placements. We also provided a detailed description of Canva's nature and features as an SaaS app, as well as several of its notable integrations. Both operating on a freemium model and promoting its strong mission and vision through educational materials have proven to be effective as a marketing tactic. In prioritizing the ideals of accessibility and creativity, Canva has arguably succeeded in its mission to democratize design tools and eliminate barriers to entry for novice designers.

In the future, further research into the functionalities of Canva could incorporate direct interviews of other users to learn more about their motivations for using the app. I also aim to create mockup redesigns of new features or pain points, and explore Canva's tech stack and system architecture in order to gain further insight into its capabilities and scalability.

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