

To Canva or not to Canva...

In an age where DIY design tools have become increasingly popular, Canva has emerged as a go-to platform for individuals and businesses looking to create visually appealing graphics with ease. Its user-friendly interface and extensive library of templates make it an attractive option for many. However, while Canva excels in digital design, it falls short when it comes to producing high-quality printed products.

This article explores the various limitations of Canva in the context of print, highlighting issues such as print quality, design flexibility, color accuracy, and file format challenges. By understanding these shortcomings, users can make more informed decisions and consider alternatives that better meet their printing needs.

Graphic Designers are worth their weight in gold for that perfect finished product which will balance beautifully the ability to shine in both print and digital- however, they may not always be the most cost effective or budget friendly option for small to medium businesses.

A little History...

Canva is an Australian based company which first launched in 2013. Founded in Perth, Australia, by Melanie Perkins, Cliff Obrecht, and Cameron Adams. As of 2022, Canva boasts 75 million Active monthly users, despite a data breach in 2019 which decrypted usernames and passwords. In that same year, Canva acquired popular photo stock sites Pexels and Pixabay. In 2024, Canva purchased UK Based Serif- the developers of Affinity Suite. They also acquired Leonardo, an AI image generation platform that same year.

Kaleido, Smartmockups, and Flourish are also all a part of the Canva Family. Canva for Education, which is a free product for schools, was launched in 2019.

There are a hundred reasons to use the popular design program! As of 2022, 75 million people actively use it monthly.

Rightly so. Even the free version offers thousands of art selections and hundreds of templates. Its drag and drop editing abilities help to make what can sometimes be an arduous and tedious process easy, fast and offers a step above results.

And, in the end it comes down to a simple truth- Canva isn't nearly as scary as the likes of Adobe products like Photoshop or Illustrator, or other design tools like Corel. It doesn't require much tech savvy to operate, and you don't have to spend years in school learning how to turn a square into a box.

But there can be a couple of common hiccups with it too- especially if you plan to send your new design off to a print shop.

Consider your end result...

Most print shops can only print exactly what you've designed, flaws and all. Changes usually need to be made by you, as Canva doesn't like to play nice with other commercial design tools. They say they do- but they really don't.

Canva also offers its own printing services- much like VistaPrint- which means that it suits its own interests in offering limited file formats to save your design in for free. And there are frequently difficulties in taking a Canva "PDF" into another software. Often, it's little things that many users may not be aware of! Such as the image not being flattened prior to saving- which displaces elements in the PDF version.

A Featherlight touch on the Legal of it all...

If you're a business trying to build a brand- remember that Canva retains Intellectual Property Rights to many of its design elements, as well as having licensing terms with many of the Fonts. Understanding those terms prior to using them will be important in avoiding potential problems down the road.

Digital Art can be a tricky path to tread when it comes to Licensing, Copyright, etc. [And the myth of changing a piece by a certain % is just that- a myth](#). Regardless of changes made to a tangible piece, that original piece and all the elements associated with it are still protected and still actionable for copyright infringement.

Copyright protects the expression of an idea, not the idea itself. A circle, for example, cannot be copyright protected as it exists in basic geometric form. The circle is an idea. A green circle with a Mermaid wearing a crown in it, though, is an expression of an idea made cohesive/tangible and is therefore protected.

Understanding the difference in these, and how these design tools make use of them, remains a crucial element when using them to design professional branding.

This article is not intended for legal advice, however, so we're moving on. You get the idea.

But my file was ready to print...

When you hit that "download" button in Canva, the excitement can quickly turn to letdown when you realize the export options are fairly basic. Sure, you can snag a PNG or JPEG, but those formats can leave you with a lackluster final product—especially when it comes to print. Printers thrive on high-quality PDF files that boast crisp vectors and layers. While

Canva does allow for PDF exports, the limitations in options can lead to a file that's less than print-ready.

Things that print shops often must compensate for, and why there may suddenly be additional charges on your *"ready to print"* file submission:

1. Size of final project: you cannot print something designed for 11 x 17 on an 8.5 x 11 and expect to get great results, especially vice versa when the completed size is smaller than the desired print size. Design for Size.
2. Element Displacement: sometimes certain elements don't save to PDF in the exact same place as you saw on screen in your designing or aren't there at all. What **you** see is not always what **we** see. Especially when it comes to layers. This often happens in the saving process after you've chosen the format to save it in.
3. Displaced Margins: Taking your design right to the edge will cause no end of complications in printing. Always leave ¼" of border around your project. In the case of a Bleed (full color right to the edge), then you need to make sure your content is a minimum ¼"- ½" is better- from the edge of that border. Otherwise, you risk your content being cut off/into and/or no longer centered properly.
4. Page numbers: When working with any intended for home production design tool, it's almost always better to center your page numbers. This is especially true when working with booklets, catalogues, etc. It's a safe and relatively foolproof strategy as the worst case in this scenario is that they may not end up exactly centered by the time all the trimming is done- but still better than being cut off completely.

So you've designed this stunning masterpiece in Canva, ready to take the print world by storm—only to discover that it's like inviting your friend who can't carry a tune to karaoke night :/ Other common print issues include blurry text, awkward cropping, and color smudges- none of which is usually visible on the screen.

My size is right- why does my print look bad?

Let's talk about something that sounds more complicated than it really is: DPI, or dots per inch. This mysterious number is the unsung hero of print quality. High DPI means crisp, clear images, while low DPI can result in an art piece that looks more like a pixelated potato.

Canva's default settings might leave your designs a bit lacking in the DPI department, rendering them less than print-worthy.

Canva's export functions often cap the resolution lower than what's optimal for printed materials. Most printers recommend files at least 300 DPI (dots per inch) for high-quality prints, but Canva doesn't guarantee that level of resolution across all designs. Using a subpar resolution can be a recipe for disaster—your beautiful graphics may turn into blurry blobs, and that's not exactly the impression you want to make at your next big meeting or event. Especially as this can alternate between the variety of elements you've chosen, varying the degrees of successful and unsuccessful additions on your print.

Challenges with Unique Branding...

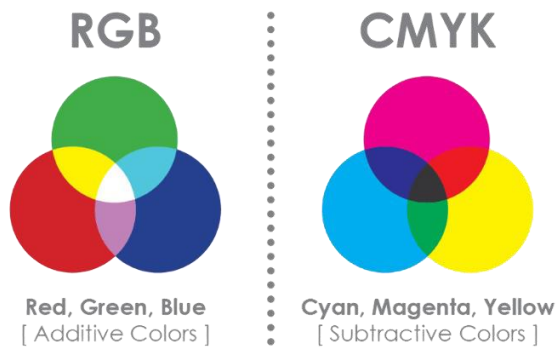
Templates are Canva's bread and butter, but sometimes they can feel more like the crust that no one wants to eat. Sure, they make designing easy, but let's face it: consumers fall for the pop of it, the unique ways a brand stands out. If you find yourself stuck in the template rut, you're likely to get designs that look like a thousand other designs out there. And while templates can be a great starting point, they often lack the pizzazz and customization that can make a brand truly shine. It's like showing up to a party wearing the same outfit as someone else—awkward!

If you're trying to cultivate a brand identity that stands out from the sea of sameness, Canva can be a bit of a challenge. While it offers fun icons and graphics, the chances of someone else using the same elements are high. In the quest for uniqueness, you might end up blending in instead. It's like trying to be the life of the party while wearing a plain black t-shirt—it just doesn't have the same impact!

Color Accuracy and Consistency Issues: RGB vs. CMYK: The Color Dilemma...

When it comes to design, colors are your best friends—unless they're not. Canva primarily

uses RGB (red, green, blue) for its color palette, perfect for screens but leaving poor CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) feeling left out. Printed products thrive on CMYK colors, and guess what? If you try to print your vibrant RGB masterpiece, you may get a muted version that resembles a sad sunset. It's like expecting a rainbow and getting a drizzle—disappointment galore!



Color consistency is key in keeping your brand looking snazzy. If you print your business cards and the colors vary wildly from batch to batch, your brand can end up looking like a confused chameleon. Using Canva might lead to varying print results, risking your overall brand identity. Imagine showing up to a meeting with a business card that looks totally different from your website—it's not a great look. Consistency is king, and Canva can sometimes leave you on the throne without a crown.

In conclusion, while Canva offers a convenient and accessible platform for creating digital designs its limitations for printed products cannot be overlooked. From issues with print quality and color accuracy to constraints on customization, users may find that their printed materials do not meet professional standards. By choosing the right tools for the job, you can ensure that your printed products reflect the quality and creativity you envision.