If you have an event at your church you want to advertise, whether it's a service, youth club, course or social, it's important that the promotional materials are eye catching and engaging.

If you don't have the money to pay for a graphic designer or buy graphic design software for an experience member of the congregation to use, you're often left with designing your poster in software not meant for design, such as Microsoft Word. This will mean the tools you have to be creative and the potential of what you can create will be limited.

But there is an online tool that will transform how you design. *Canva.com* is a free online graphic design programme that is easy to use and ideal for churches with limited time and budgets.

With Canva, simply create an account and select the type of graphic you want to make. You can choose a pre-made template to edit or start completely from scratch. There are hundreds of templates to use and it can be as easy as selecting the template you like, changing the sample text to information about your event and then downloading the final product. There are poster templates for every occasion, including fundraisers, concerts, conferences and much more.

If you are starting a poster from scratch, Canva lets you get really creative with all sorts of images, icons and shapes ready to be added to your design. It's just a case of clicking and dragging them into place. Once you're happy with what you've added, you can change the colours, add some text and you're ready to download. Because you've designed it online, it's also incredibly easy to share your design straight to social media.

It's worth noting that while much of what Canva offers is free, there are some resources that do cost. However, they're just $1 per item and each item is clearly marked if you have to pay for them.

Top tips for using Canva

- There are all sorts of other products you can design including social media graphics, logos, certificates, presentations, photo collages, invites and postcards

- You can share designs with people to get their opinions before you download

- Once you've finished your poster or graphic it will be saved in your workspace, making it easy to make edits/updates in the future

- It's possible to work as a team on Canva, making it easy to share and work on the same designs

- Upgrade to Canva for Work which gives you even more tools to use - non-profits can apply for a free subscription

- If it's being used for print and web, make sure you think about how it will look in both formats, especially when it comes to the borders and readability

Top tips for creating great design

- Limit the number of fonts you use on your poster, one serif font and one sans serif font should normally be enough (don't forget to make sure the font you use is easily readable)

- Too much text can be confusing, try and condense the information down to the very basic information. If you have more to say, include a web address on the design where people can find out more.

- Keep things simple – A simple design that's not too busy will draw people's eyes to the most important information, it's okay to have blank spaces!

- Think about theme and audiences – If you're designing a poster for a youth event, for example, the colours and fonts you choose should be relevant to that audience.

- Be specific in your composition – use size to convey importance, think about what the most important information is and where it should sit, put purpose into the arrangement of all the items in your design to lead people's eyes

- And finally - Take risks and be bold. Try arranging your text in a different way, fill the space with a large image or using some clashing colours, it's okay to experiment and play around with the tools at your disposal.

You can find some more design tip on Canva's website

Tallie Proud
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