

Adobe Creative Cloud vs. Canva Pro vs. Figma: The Design Tool Verdict

Unvarnished Reviews Research

This report synthesizes data from 30,000+ verified user reviews and practitioner community posts collected from G2, Capterra, TrustRadius, Trustpilot, the Adobe Community forums, Reddit r/graphic_design and r/web_design, and Figma and Canva practitioner communities. Pricing data reflects vendor pricing pages, CostBench verified transaction data, FTC filings, and independent procurement analysis current as of June 2026. Full research methodology at unvarnishedreviews.com/methodology. Research Notes available on request at editorial@unvarnishedreviews.com.

The Verdict Up Front

Adobe Creative Cloud is the industry standard for professional creative work, 32.5 million subscribers, Photoshop and Illustrator as the definitive tools for image editing and vector design, Premiere Pro and After Effects as the benchmarks for video and motion, and Adobe Firefly commanding 29% of the AI design tool market. It is also the platform the FTC sued in June 2024 for hiding early termination fees in its "Annual plan, paid monthly" default, where cancelling after 14 days triggers a fee of 50% of the remaining contract balance. Trustpilot rates Adobe at 1.2/5. The Better Business Bureau has recorded over 2,000 complaints in three years, mostly citing incorrect billing and the cancellation fee. The product is genuinely best-in-class. The commercial relationship is one of the most complained-about in the software industry.

Canva Pro is the platform that democratized design, 220 million monthly users, an estimated valuation of \$26 billion, and the tool that marketing teams, educators, social media managers, and non-designers reach for when they need professional-looking output without a design degree. It is not a Photoshop replacement. It is not trying to be. What it is, the fastest path from idea to polished visual output, is exactly what most business users actually need, and its AI image generation, brand kit management, and presentation tools have closed the capability gap with Adobe Express significantly.

Figma went public in July 2025 at \$33/share, popped 250% on day one to a \$68 billion valuation, and had lost 81% of that peak by January 2026. The backstory: Adobe tried to acquire Figma for \$20 billion in 2022, regulators blocked it in December 2023, Adobe paid Figma a \$1 billion breakup fee, then killed its own competing product Adobe XD. Figma survived the acquisition attempt, went public, and is now being squeezed by AI features from Adobe Firefly (29% AI design market share) versus Figma Make (2%). For collaborative UI/UX design, Figma remains the gold standard. For everything else, it is an incomplete answer.

The design tool market in 2026 has stopped being a single-platform decision. The question is not which tool to use, it is which tool to use for which workflow.

The Backstory That Shapes Every Comparison

Adobe's \$20 Billion Attempt to Buy Figma

In September 2022, Adobe announced a \$20 billion cash-and-stock acquisition of Figma, what would have been one of the largest software startup acquisitions in history. Regulators saw it differently.

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the European Commission, and the U.S. Department of Justice all scrutinized the deal. The CMA concluded the acquisition would harm innovation for design software used by the vast majority of UK digital designers. The EU had similar concerns. In December 2023, Adobe and Figma cancelled the deal, citing "no clear path" for antitrust approvals in Europe and the UK.

Adobe paid Figma a \$1 billion termination fee.

The competitive consequence: Adobe, having argued it didn't meaningfully compete with Figma, admitted during the regulatory process that its only relevant competing product was Adobe XD, which had lost \$25 million in the previous year. Shortly after the deal collapsed, Adobe discontinued Adobe XD.

Figma, unburdened from acquisition limbo and funded by Adobe's \$1 billion termination payment, launched new AI features, grew its team by over 50%, and went public in July 2025. On its first day of trading, the stock popped 250% to a \$68 billion valuation. By January 2026, it had lost 81% of that peak, trading around \$30/share, roughly flat to its IPO price.

The AI arms race this backstory ignited is the defining competitive dynamic in the design tool market. Adobe's Firefly AI launched in March 2023 and has generated over 24 billion AI assets, commanding 29% of the AI design tool market, more than Midjourney, Canva AI, or DALL-E. Figma Make, launched in July 2025, holds approximately 2%.

The FTC Lawsuit Against Adobe

In June 2024, the FTC sued Adobe for hiding early termination fees. The complaint describes a specific and deliberate commercial trap:

Adobe's default plan for individual subscribers, "Annual plan, paid monthly", requires a one-year commitment, but this is not prominently disclosed at signup. Subscribers who attempt to cancel after the 14-day window are charged 50% of the remaining contract balance. For a subscriber at the midpoint of their annual commitment at \$59.99/month, that cancellation fee exceeds \$360.

The FTC complaint further describes Adobe using a dedicated "Retention" team, not customer support, a dedicated retention team, to discourage cancellations. The complaint describes hidden cancellation buttons, multiple unnecessary steps, password reentry, retention offers, and surveys designed to friction the process. Consumers who believe they have cancelled continue to be charged.

The Adobe Community forums document this pattern extensively, a 10-year customer discovering a £332 early termination fee; a student charged \$130 for cancelling; a subscriber unable to remove a credit card while being charged for services they don't want.

Adobe settled with the DOJ and FTC. The settlement requires Adobe to make cancellation easier and to disclose the early termination fee more prominently. As of June 2026, Adobe has updated its signup flow. The Community forums continue to document cancellation complaints.

Trustpilot: 1.2/5. This is not a product quality rating. Adobe's product quality is not 1.2/5, it is among the highest in the industry. The Trustpilot score reflects the commercial experience: the subscription trap, the cancellation difficulty, the fee structure. These are two separate things, and anyone evaluating Adobe must assess both.

Platform Ratings at a Glance

Platform	G2	Capterra	Trustpilot
Adobe Creative Cloud	4.5 / 5	4.7 / 5	1.2 / 5
Canva	4.7 / 5	4.7 / 5	4.3 / 5
Figma	4.7 / 5	4.7 / 5	4.0 / 5

The G2 and Capterra gaps between Adobe and its competitors are small, all three are highly rated professional tools. The Trustpilot gap is not small. Adobe at 1.2/5 versus Canva at 4.3/5 and Figma at 4.0/5 reflects a commercial experience problem that product satisfaction scores do not capture.

Who Each Platform Is Actually Built For

Adobe Creative Cloud is built for professional creatives, designers, photographers, videographers, motion graphics artists, and print production specialists who need the deepest toolset in the industry and are prepared to invest in learning it. Photoshop and Illustrator have no true equivalents for pixel-level image editing and vector illustration. Premiere Pro and After Effects are the industry benchmarks for video and motion. InDesign owns professional print layout. For the full-stack creative professional, Adobe is the answer, if you can navigate the commercial relationship.

Canva Pro is built for everyone else, marketing managers, social media teams, HR departments, educators, small business owners, and anyone who needs to produce professional-looking visual content without spending weeks learning design software. Its template-first approach, AI generation, brand kit management, and one-click resize across formats is exactly the workflow that marketing teams use every day. It is not a design tool in the Adobe sense. It is a content production tool with a design-friendly interface.

Figma is built for product designers, UX designers, and design teams building digital products. Its collaborative real-time editing, component systems, prototyping, and developer handoff (Dev Mode) are the gold standard for UI/UX design workflow. FigJam, its whiteboard and diagramming tool, is used by product teams, strategists, and cross-functional teams for workshops, user journey mapping, and collaborative ideation. Outside of UI/UX and digital product design, Figma is less compelling than alternatives.

What Users Actually Report

Adobe Creative Cloud: What Works

G2 and Capterra reviewers consistently identify three strengths: depth of professional toolset, industry standard status, and Firefly AI integration.

Professional depth is documented consistently, Photoshop's pixel-level editing, Illustrator's vector precision, Premiere Pro's color science, After Effects' compositing, represent decades of refinement that no competing tool has replicated at the same level. For serious creative professionals, Adobe's capability ceiling is the highest available.

Adobe Firefly's generative AI integration, embedded directly into Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, and the broader Creative Cloud suite, means that 32.5 million Creative Cloud subscribers have AI assistance already in the tools they use daily. The Generative Fill feature in Photoshop is specifically called out by practitioners as one of the most

genuinely useful AI features in any creative tool.

Industry standard status has a practical value: portfolios built in Adobe tools are expected by employers. Clients request Adobe native files. Printers and production studios specify Adobe formats. For professionals working in creative industries, Adobe compatibility is not optional.

Adobe Creative Cloud: What Doesn't Work

The subscription trap is the defining complaint. The FTC lawsuit documented it at the regulatory level. The Adobe Community forum documents it at the human level. The pattern, defaulting to annual-paid-monthly, burying the termination fee disclosure, routing cancellations through a retention team, has generated more complaints across more platforms than any creative software product in the industry. The settlement requires changes; the complaints continue.

Pricing complexity. Adobe offers individual app subscriptions (\$20.99/month for Photoshop alone), Creative Cloud All Apps (\$59.99/month standard), Photography plans, team plans, enterprise plans, and a promotional "three months at \$34.99 then \$69.99" offer documented in 2026 that hides the price jump in "view terms." The gap between monthly and annual pricing, \$89.99/month versus \$59.99/month, effectively forces annual commitment for most users at a price point where the cancellation trap is most financially significant.

Performance on older hardware. Capterra and G2 reviewers consistently note that Adobe applications require powerful hardware. For teams with mixed hardware environments, Adobe's performance requirements create a have/have-not split in the organization.

Steep learning curve. The same depth that makes Adobe powerful makes it slow to learn. For non-designers asked to produce content occasionally, Adobe's learning investment is rarely justified.

Canva: What Works

G2 and Capterra reviewers consistently identify three strengths: speed to output, accessibility for non-designers, and template breadth.

The core Canva value proposition is documented consistently: teams that were previously dependent on designers for routine content creation, social posts, presentation slides, internal communications, event graphics, can now produce professional-looking output independently. The template library (hundreds of thousands of professionally designed templates), drag-and-drop interface, and Brand Kit functionality combine to deliver a self-service content production capability that has genuinely changed how marketing teams operate.

Canva's AI features, AI image generation, Magic Write for copy, background removal, and the AI presentation builder, have meaningfully closed the gap with Adobe Express for non-designer content creation. Magic Resize (one-click reformatting across dimensions) is specifically called out as a time-saving feature that Adobe lacks in an equivalent accessible form.

Canva's Trustpilot score (4.3/5) reflects the commercial experience matching the product experience, a meaningful contrast with Adobe.

Canva: What Doesn't Work

Creative limitations for professional designers. Canva is explicitly not a tool for complex design work. Multiple practitioner reviews document that "detailed or complex designs can sometimes feel restricted compared to more advanced design software." For designers accustomed to Photoshop or Illustrator, Canva's template-first constraint and

limited precision tools are frustrating.

Template dependency can limit originality. When thousands of users have access to the same template library, template-derived work can look similar across organizations. Teams with strong brand differentiation needs find Canva's template model limiting.

Cannot sell templates with Canva Pro content. A documented limitation for designers who create templates for resale, Canva Pro assets cannot be included in commercial template products.

AI image accuracy. Multiple recent reviews flag accuracy issues with Canva's AI image generation even with detailed prompts, an area where Firefly and Midjourney outperform.

Figma: What Works

G2 and Capterra reviewers consistently praise three strengths: real-time collaboration, component system depth, and developer handoff.

Real-time collaborative editing, multiple designers working simultaneously in the same file with live cursor visibility and comment threading, is Figma's most documented competitive advantage. For design teams, the shift from emailing Sketch files to live collaboration in Figma represents an operational step change that practitioners describe as transformative.

The component system, reusable design elements that update globally when modified, is the gold standard for maintaining design consistency at scale. Design systems built in Figma propagate changes across all instances automatically. For organizations with established design systems, this architecture delivers genuine efficiency.

Dev Mode, a dedicated workspace for developers to inspect designs, grab CSS and code snippets, and compare changes between versions, is specifically praised for improving designer-developer handoff and reducing the back-and-forth that previously characterized this workflow.

Figma: What Doesn't Work

Limited image editing. Capterra reviewers consistently flag that Figma lacks advanced image editing options comparable to Adobe software. As a vector-based design tool, pixel-level image manipulation is a documented gap. Designers frequently work across Figma and Photoshop for this reason.

Mobile app limitations. Multiple reviews note that meaningful editing on the Figma mobile app is essentially not possible, a relevant constraint for teams that need flexibility on mobile devices.

AI competitive disadvantage. Figma Make, launched July 2025, holds approximately 2% of the AI design tool market versus Adobe Firefly's 29%. The AI capability gap between Figma and Adobe is significant and growing. For organizations evaluating which platform will lead in AI-assisted design, Adobe Firefly's embedded integration across 32.5 million subscribers is a meaningful advantage.

Version tracking complexity. Practitioners describe difficulty keeping track of different versions of designs, a friction point for teams managing multiple iterations across complex projects.

Post-IPO valuation compression. Figma's stock lost 81% of its peak value by January 2026. This is relevant for enterprise organizations evaluating multi-year platform commitments, not because Figma is at risk of failure (it is not), but because the stock price compression reflects investor uncertainty about Figma's ability to sustain growth against Adobe's AI investment at scale.

Pricing Reality (June 2026)

Adobe Creative Cloud

Plan	Monthly Price	Annual Commitment
Photography (Photoshop + Lightroom)	\$19.99/month	Annual required
Single App (e.g., Photoshop alone)	\$20.99/month	Annual required
Creative Cloud All Apps	\$59.99/month (annual paid monthly)	Annual, cancellation fee applies
Creative Cloud All Apps	\$89.99/month	Monthly, no cancellation fee
Creative Cloud All Apps (upfront)	\$599.88/year	Annual prepaid, no monthly option
Teams (All Apps)	\$89.99/user/month	Annual required
Enterprise	Custom	Custom

The early termination trap: The \$59.99/month "Annual plan, paid monthly" is the default for most individual subscribers. Cancelling after 14 days triggers a fee of 50% of remaining contract balance, approximately \$360 at midpoint of the annual commitment.

The monthly escape valve: The \$89.99/month plan allows cancellation at any time, but costs \$360/year more than the annual plan. Adobe's pricing model is explicitly designed to make the annual plan financially coercive.

Hidden cost: AI credits. Adobe Firefly AI generation beyond included credits requires purchasing Generative Credits. High-volume AI users encounter this ceiling and either pay for additional credits or constrain their AI usage.

Canva

Plan	Price	Users
Free	\$0	Up to 5 people
Canva Pro	\$15/month (1 person)	1
Canva Pro	\$120/year (1 person)	1
Canva Teams	\$300/year	Up to 5 people
Enterprise	Custom	25+

Canva Pro annual (\$120/year) is the most direct Adobe comparison point. For a single user, Canva Pro costs \$120/year versus Adobe Creative Cloud All Apps at \$599.88/year, a 5x pricing difference. For the non-designer who primarily needs template-based content production, that gap is difficult to justify in Photoshop's direction.

Figma

Plan	Price	Notes
Free (Starter)	\$0	Up to 3 Figma files
Figma Professional	\$15/editor/month (annual)	Unlimited files
Figma Organization	\$45/editor/month (annual)	Design systems, SSO
Figma Enterprise	\$75/editor/month (annual)	Advanced admin

FigJam	\$5/editor/month (annual)	Whiteboard/diagram add-on
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Figma charges per editor, viewers are free. For teams where only a subset of members actively design, this model is economical. For teams where everyone designs, costs accumulate faster than Canva's flat team pricing.

TCO Comparison: 5-Person Marketing Team, Annual

Platform	Annual Cost	Best For
Canva Teams	\$300/year	All-purpose content production
Figma Professional (5 editors)	\$900/year	UI/UX design team
Adobe CC All Apps (5 users, teams)	\$5,400/year	Full professional creative suite

For a 5-person marketing team producing social content, presentations, and campaign graphics, **Canva at \$300/year** delivers 80% of what they need at 5.6% of the Adobe price. For a 5-person product design team building a digital product, **Figma at \$900/year** is the most appropriate choice. For a 5-person creative agency producing print, video, photography, and digital, **Adobe at \$5,400/year** is the only platform with the full professional toolset.

The AI Design Tool Landscape (2026)

AI has become the primary battleground in design tools, and the competitive positions are clarifying:

Adobe Firefly: 29% AI design tool market share, 24 billion AI assets generated. Embedded in Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, and the full Creative Cloud. Generative Fill in Photoshop is the most widely praised AI feature in professional creative tools. Firefly is commercially safe for enterprise use, Adobe has trained it exclusively on licensed content and Adobe Stock.

Canva AI: AI image generation, Magic Write, and AI presentation building. Accessible to 220 million users. Less technically sophisticated than Firefly but more accessible to non-designers. The volume of Canva AI output is substantial even if the ceiling is lower.

Figma Make: Launched July 2025. ~2% AI design tool market share. Allows designers to generate UI components and layouts from natural language prompts. Early-stage but strategically critical to Figma's competitive positioning against Adobe's Firefly advantage.

The AI gap between Figma and Adobe is the most significant competitive dynamic to monitor. Adobe's 29% market share versus Figma's 2% is not a stable equilibrium, it will either compress as Figma develops, or expand as Adobe's Firefly integration deepens across its 32.5 million subscriber base.

The Decision Framework

Choose Adobe Creative Cloud if:

- You are a professional designer, photographer, videographer, or motion graphics artist
- Industry-standard file compatibility (PSD, AI, INDD, PRPROJ) is required for client or production workflows

- Deep pixel-level image editing (Photoshop), professional vector illustration (Illustrator), or video production (Premiere Pro, After Effects) are primary workflows
- You want the most advanced AI image generation embedded in professional creative tools (Firefly)
- You have read and understood the cancellation terms, specifically the 50% early termination fee on annual-paid-monthly plans, before subscribing
- Your organization has dedicated creative professionals who will use the full toolset to justify the cost

Choose Canva Pro if:

- Your primary users are non-designers who need to produce professional-looking content independently
- Social media graphics, presentations, internal communications, event materials, and marketing collateral are the primary output types
- Speed-to-output is more important than design precision
- Your team needs Brand Kit management to ensure consistent visual identity across many content producers
- Budget is a genuine constraint, \$120/year versus \$599.88/year is a meaningful organizational decision
- You do not need to export files in professional creative formats

Choose Figma if:

- Your team builds digital products, websites, apps, software interfaces
- Real-time collaborative design with multiple editors simultaneously is operationally important
- A design system with reusable components that propagate globally is a requirement
- Developer handoff, providing developers with CSS snippets, asset exports, and design inspection, is a significant workflow
- You are specifically in UI/UX design, product design, or design systems work

The hybrid reality:

Most organizations use more than one of these tools. Marketing teams often use Canva for content production while product teams use Figma for UI design. Creative agencies use Adobe for professional client deliverables while using Canva for rapid social content. The question is not which single platform to choose, it is which combination fits your team's actual workflows.

The Bottom Line

Adobe Creative Cloud, Canva Pro, and Figma are three genuinely excellent platforms solving three genuinely different problems. The mistake most buyers make is treating this as a single-winner competition.

Adobe Creative Cloud is the most appropriate choice for professional creative work, the industry standard, the deepest toolset, the best AI integration. Its commercial practices are the most documented complaint in the design software industry. Read the cancellation terms before subscribing. The FTC lawsuit was not filed for no reason.

Canva Pro is the most appropriate choice for most non-designer business users, fast, accessible, affordable, and increasingly capable. For marketing teams, content creators, and organizations that need visual content without design expertise, Canva's value is genuine and difficult to match at its price point.

Figma is the most appropriate choice for product and UX design teams, the gold standard for collaborative digital product design. Its AI gap versus Adobe Firefly is the most important strategic consideration for organizations evaluating long-term platform commitment. The IPO story, \$68 billion peak to \$30/share in six months, reflects investor uncertainty about this exact competitive pressure.

The one finding that belongs in every creative tool evaluation: Adobe's Trustpilot score of 1.2/5 is not a product quality rating. It is a commercial experience rating. Before signing any Adobe subscription, verify that you understand the early termination fee, the cancellation process, and the automatic renewal terms. That knowledge, had in advance, makes Adobe's professional toolset an excellent investment. Discovered afterward, it generates the complaints that built a 1.2-star rating.

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