DESIGNFOREVER JOURNAL

What AI Did to Design Templates

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For twenty years the design template was a shortcut: someone already solved the grid, you swapped the logo. Then generative AI arrived and did the same job in a prompt. The result is not that templates vanished. It is that **the market split**.

On one side: infinite pictures of layouts — posters, flyers, “brand kits,” social sets — generated faster than anyone can review them. On the other: documents that still have to survive Tuesday’s copy, a Spanish translation, and a new navy. Those two products look similar in a thumbnail. They are not the same business.

The numbers below are the public record of that split. They are not a vibe.

91%
of tech designers use AI weekly — up from 54% a year earlier

$16.9B
forecast generative-AI design market by 2035 — 17× today’s slice

265M
Canva monthly users. Figma: 13 million. The mass layer already won scale.

−17%
Shutterstock revenue, Q2 2026 vs a year earlier. Stock got cheaper to fake.

The old template economy, in one paragraph

Envato, Creative Market, ThemeForest, GraphicRiver, Placeit, Canva’s template library, Adobe Stock — they all sold the same promise: a finished-looking file you could restyle. Subscription libraries (Envato Elements, Storyblocks) replaced à-la-carte downloads. Canva went further and put the editor *on* the template, so non-designers never opened Illustrator.

That model scaled because design labor was expensive and demand for “a flyer by Friday” was not. AI did not invent that demand. It collapsed the cost of faking the supply.

How big the design market is now

Two markets get mashed together in headlines. Keep them apart.

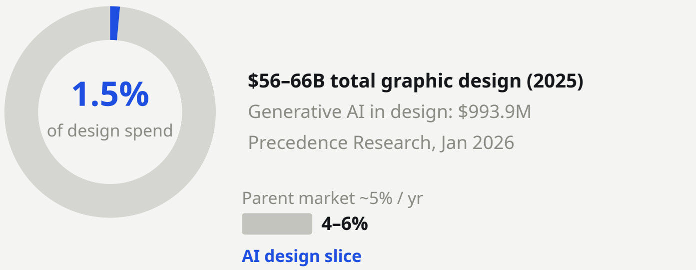
The **total graphic design market** — services plus software, AI and not — sits in a wide band depending on who is counting: roughly **$56–66 billion in 2025** (NextMSC and SkyQuest, as compiled in 2026 industry roundups). North America alone was about **$21.6 billion, 39% of global spend** (Mordor Intelligence, January 2026). Fortune Business Insights has used a lower print-heavy figure (~$46 billion) with a climb toward ~$78 billion by 2032. Different scopes, same shape: a large, slow-growing industry.

The **generative AI in design** slice is still small and compounding fast:

Year	Generative AI in design	Source
2025	$993.9 million	Precedence Research, Jan 2026
2026	$1.33 billion	same
2035 (forecast)	$16.9 billion	same, 32.75% CAGR

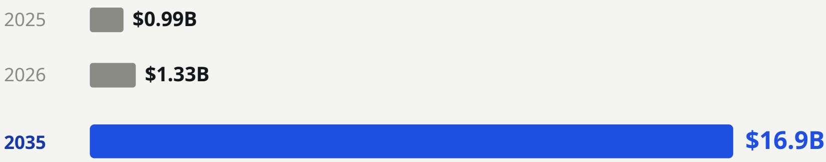
That is about **1.5% of total design spend today**, growing at **~33% a year** while the parent market grows **4–6%**. Graphic design is the leading application inside that AI slice — ahead of product, interior, and architecture — because campaigns need volume: variants, locales, reskins.

Still a sliver. Compounding much faster.



AI is not the design market. It is ~1.5% of spend, compounding at ~33% a year while the parent market crawls at 4–6%.

The 2035 bar is the point



Same source, same CAGR (32.75%). The forecast is 17× the 2025 slice.

Precedence Research, Generative AI in Design Market, January 2026

If the curve is even half right, generation stops being a rounding error in design budgets this decade.

Software itself is a thinner cut. The Business Research Company's 2026 graphic-designing-software report puts the **tool market at $9.28 billion in 2025 and $10.13 billion in 2026** (~9% CAGR), with AI integration listed as a primary forecast driver through 2030.

AI is not "the design market." It is the fastest-growing *input* to it.

The platforms that ate "make me a template"

Canva is the mass-market template company that learned to speak AI. Co-founder Cliff Obrecht told TechCrunch in February 2026 that Canva closed

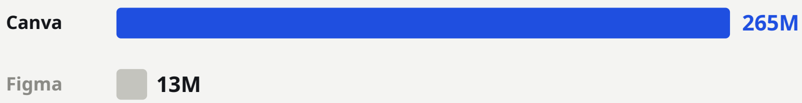
2025 with **265 million monthly active users**, **more than 31 million paid subscribers**, and **$4 billion in annual recurring revenue**. Sacra's independent estimate matches the $4B ARR and puts year-on-year growth at ~43% from $2.8B. B2B (companies with 25+ seats) roughly doubled to about **$500 million ARR**.

That is not a niche template shop. That is a communications platform. A typical 2025 month of Canva usage was larger than the population of Brazil. Two-thirds of Figma's users are not designers either (Figma S-1, 2025). The "professional vs amateur" line dissolved at every tier.

Adobe answered from the other direction: put generation *inside* the tools designers already pay for. Firefly models had been used to create **more than 22 billion assets** by Adobe's own April 24, 2025 newsroom post, and **more than 24 billion** by the June 2025 Firefly mobile launch. Press coverage at the time noted the jump from 22B to 24B in a matter of weeks. Firefly sits in Photoshop, Illustrator, Express, Premiere. Secondary aggregators put Firefly around **29% of the AI design-tool market** as of end-2024 (Midjourney ~19%, Canva AI ~16%, DALL-E ~14%). Treat share figures as directional — Adobe does not break Firefly out as audited product ARR in its 10-K.

Figma remains the collaboration canvas for product teams: **13 million monthly active users** (S-1, data as of March 2025) and **$1.06 billion in 2025 revenue**, up 41%. It is not a flyer marketplace. It is the place UI work still gets finished. AI is showing up there as a scalpel, not as a poster mill.

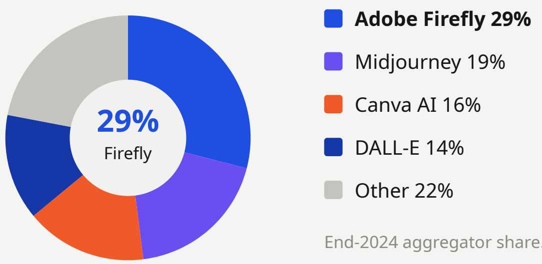
Canva is ~20× Figma on monthly users



Canva: TechCrunch / Obrecht, Feb 2026. Figma: S-1, MAU as of March 2025. Different jobs — same le
Two-thirds of Figma's users are not designers. The "pro vs amateur" line dissolved at every tier.

Scale is not quality. It is proof that "make me a template" is already a consumer product, not a studio specialty.

Who owns "generate a design"



End-2024 aggregator share. Directional — Adobe does not pı

Firefly's 24 billion generated assets sit inside Photoshop and Illustrator. Canva's 265 million people sit on templates. Different stacks, same demand: a designed-looking file by 4 p.m.

What designers actually do with AI

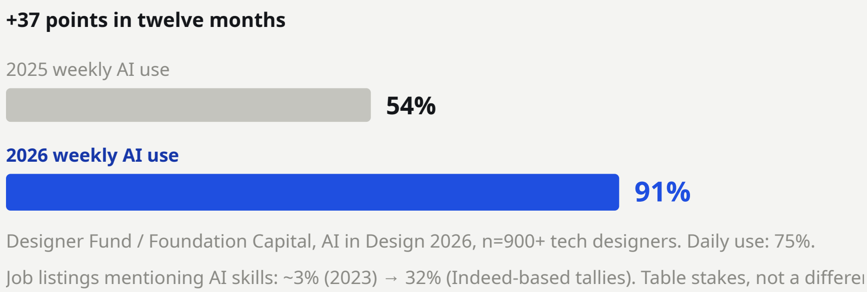
The cleanest year-over-year survey in this category is **AI in Design 2026** (Designer Fund and Foundation Capital, Q1 2026): **900+ tech designers**.

Behavior	2025	2026
Use AI for design at least weekly	54%	**91%**
Use AI daily	—	**75%**
Average off-the-shelf AI tools in the stack	3	**7**

That is a 37-point jump in weekly use in twelve months. The same survey's biggest year-over-year movers were code generation, wireframing, and design systems — not "make me a logo." Ideation and prototyping remain the everyday jobs. **62%** still name inconsistent output as the main friction; **80%** say reliable quality is what makes a tool stick.

Broader graphic-design polls (AIGA-cited roundups) put "any AI tool" closer to **75%**, up from ~35% in 2023. The tech-designer number is hotter; print and packaging are cooler. Both are up and to the right.

Job listings tell the same story from the buyer side: mentions of AI skills in design postings went from about **3% in 2023 to 32%** in later Indeed-based tallies. The skill is no longer a differentiator. It is table stakes for production work.



Broader graphic-design polls sit closer to 75% "any AI tool," up from ~35% in 2023. Print is cooler; production work is not.

What got cheaper — and what got worse

Adobe-linked research has been quoted at **50–80% less time on routine production** (resize, background, first-pass variants). That matches what anyone who has used Firefly Generative Fill or Canva Magic Studio already felt. First drafts are free. Taste is not.

Three things got worse at the same time:

1. Stock and content libraries lost their monopoly on "a picture of X." Shutterstock's own filings are the blunt instrument. Full-year 2025: Content revenue was $786.7 million, up 4% only because Envato (acquired July 2024) was in the numbers for a full year — offset by "continued weakness" in the core content business. Q4 2025 Content was **down 11%**. Q2 2026 was worse: **total revenue $221.8 million, down 17% year over year**; Content **$165.7 million, also down 17%**, blamed on weak new-customer acquisition. Getty and other stock roundups have described **20–30% revenue pressure** in the same window as AI imagery replaced a slice of search-and-buy.

Envato — once the cathedral of WordPress themes and After Effects templates — is being run as a subscription asset hose (Elements), not as a hit-driven marketplace. In 2026 it ended the exclusive-author ladder and moved sellers to a **flat 50% share**. That is what a platform does when per-item scarcity is no longer the product.

2. Supply exploded. Discovery did not. Unlimited libraries plus AI submissions mean more items, thinner per-item earnings, and a feed that looks like last week's feed. A template used to be scarce because a human spent two days on the grid. A prompt spends two seconds. The thumbnail still says "Premium Flyer." The file behind it is often a picture of a flyer.

3. Sameness became the default aesthetic. When millions of people ask the same models for "minimalist grand opening flyer, gold and black, luxury," you do not get a market of styles. You get a weather system. Brands that needed to look like themselves started looking like the model.

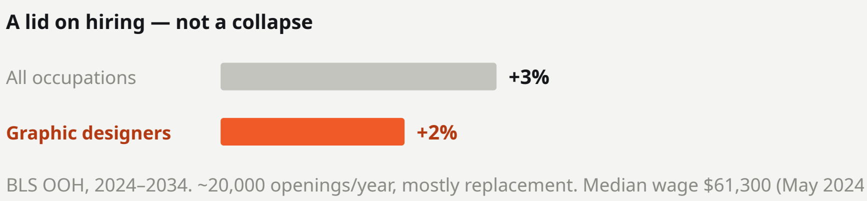
Jobs: not a collapse, a lid on hiring

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is not poetic, which is why it is useful.

Metric	Figure	Source
Median wage, graphic designers	$61,300 (May 2024)	BLS OEWS
Top 10%	more than $103,030	same
Employment, 2024 base	~290,900	BLS OOH

Metric	Figure	Source
Projected growth, 2024–2034	**2%** (slower than the 3% all-occupation average)	BLS OOH, Aug 2025
Openings per year	~20,000, mostly replacement	same

The Occupational Outlook Handbook names the mechanism: designers can use generative AI in the first step, iterate faster, and **those productivity gains are expected to limit demand**. That is not “AI took the jobs.” It is “AI absorbed the growth that would have been new seats.”



The BLS names AI as the constraint: faster iteration limits headcount growth. Operators of the tools are not cheaper. First-draft labor is.

A 2024 Gitnux-cited survey found **22% of graphic-design roles saw ~15% salary bumps** for demonstrated AI skills. Directional, one survey — but it matches the listing data. The people who run the tools are not cheaper. The people who only produced first drafts are.

Templates did not die. The *file* did.

Here is the part the market-size tables cannot say.

A Canva template, an Envato PSD, a Midjourney poster, and a Firefly “design” are all **pictures of a layout**. Some of them are editable rectangles. Almost none of them are a layout with rules: type that has a range, lists that grow down instead of through the footer, brand tokens that restyle the sheet, copy that can be translated without a designer reflowing every box.

That is why AI felt like it replaced templates. For the job “I need something that looks designed by 4 p.m.,” a generated image is good enough, and it is free. For the job “this menu has to be the same design in English and Korean next month, with Tuesday’s prices,” a generated image is a mood board.

The template market that still grows is the one that sells **working documents**: structured fields, clamped type, a brand kit you state once. The template market that is under pressure is the one that sold a JPEG of competence.

We wrote the layout half of that argument in Layouts that never break and the brand half in State your brand once. The AI half is simpler: **generation is an input. It is not a file format.**

What the next five years look like from here

If Precedence’s curve is even half right, generative AI in design is a **$4-ish billion** line by 2030 and a **mid-teens billions** line by 2035. Canva and Adobe will keep stuffing generation into the editor. Stock will keep selling data licenses to the same models that ate search. Marketplace authors will keep getting paid like a streaming catalog, not like a hit store.

None of that decides whether *your* flyer survives a copy change.

The winning template in 2026 is not the one that looks most like the prompt. It is the one you can open, brand, translate, and export without the grid collapsing. AI can fill the photograph. It should not be asked to invent the columns.

If you want to see the difference on a real sheet, open the marketplace, pick a flyer or a menu, and replace the dummy copy. The preview is the document. That is the point.

Sources

Figures above are attributed in place. Primary and near-primary references:

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- TechCrunch, February 2026, citing Canva COO Cliff Obrecht (Web Summit Qatar) — 265M MAU, 31M+ paid, $4B ARR
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- The Business Research Company, *Graphic Designing Software Global Market Report 2026* — $9.28B (2025) → $10.13B (2026)
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