

CHILI publisher business report

Dynamic Layouts

THE NEXT STEP IN TEMPLATE-BASED EDITING



PART 1

The current state

Absolute positioning

How we position elements on a canvas has not changed in decades

Graphics files - including Smart Templates - position elements on a canvas or page using absolute values. A canvas can contain different types of frames, with varying kinds of content: these are, called frames. Frames contain text, images, or colors, and there are also lines with a thickness and a color.

These frames have their position set as the number of millimeters, inches, points, or pixels from the origin point, typically the top-left corner of the canvas. Another set of 2 absolute numbers in those same units defines their size. A single number of degrees represents rotation. This set of five values gets applied to every object on a canvas in what is called a transformation matrix, a standard definition of X and Y position, X and Y size, and degrees rotation.

Every time people change an object on a canvas, they are manipulating the transformation matrix behind the scenes.



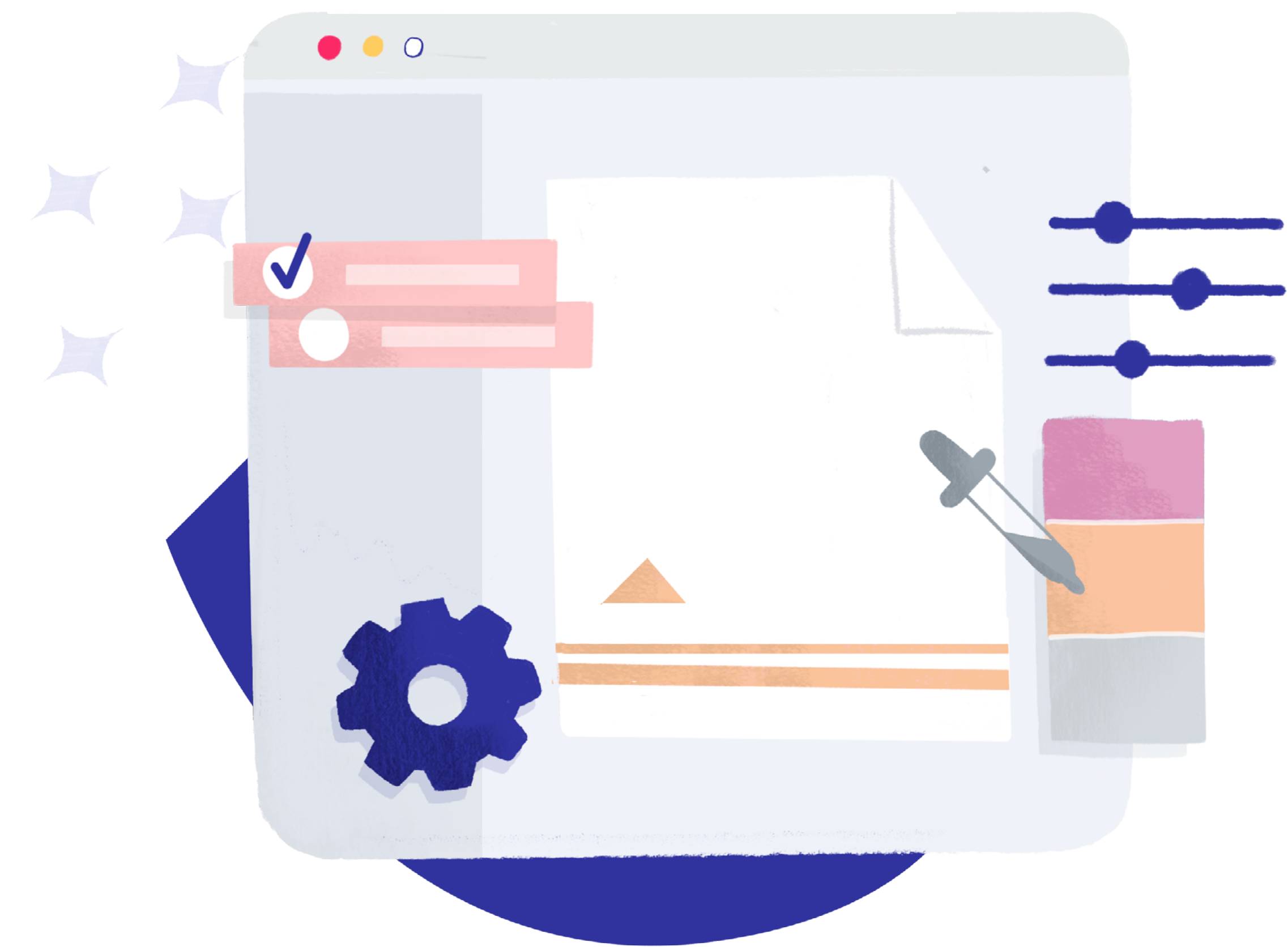
Specialized tools

Changing a frame's characteristics requires dedicated tools

When working with graphics files - including templates - users can change a frame's transformation matrix, which holds its position, size, and rotation. Also, they can edit a frame's content: replace an image, modify text, or change the background color or its stroke.

That sounds relatively straightforward, but as many a developer who tried to build an online editor will tell you, editing graphics files, be they for web or print, is no mean feat. Constraints define if an object can be edited at all, and how. Layers, opacities, overprints, color spaces, and many more factors have to be accounted for.

The basis, however, stays the same. An editing tool modifies frames' transformation matrices and their content. Most graphics software does so with absolute values.



Advanced skills required

Making templates flexible and interactive requires advanced programming skills

With the advent of mobile computing, web designers quickly became aware that absolute values were insufficient to enable their web sites to be viewed comfortably on a big display as well as on a smartphone with its screen smaller than the palm of your hand.

Responsive design with CSS and Javascript was the solution: elements on a web page were carefully positioned, often positioned with relative values expressed as a percentage of the viewport width. CSS media queries and Javascript provided some basic interactivity. And while it is also possible to get some of this functionality in Smart Templates, this will often require document actions, and some javascript.

Making any type of output for print or online use truly flexible, interactive, and responsive, requires some advanced scripting skills, which are often outside of a designer's comfort zone.



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PART 2

Challenges

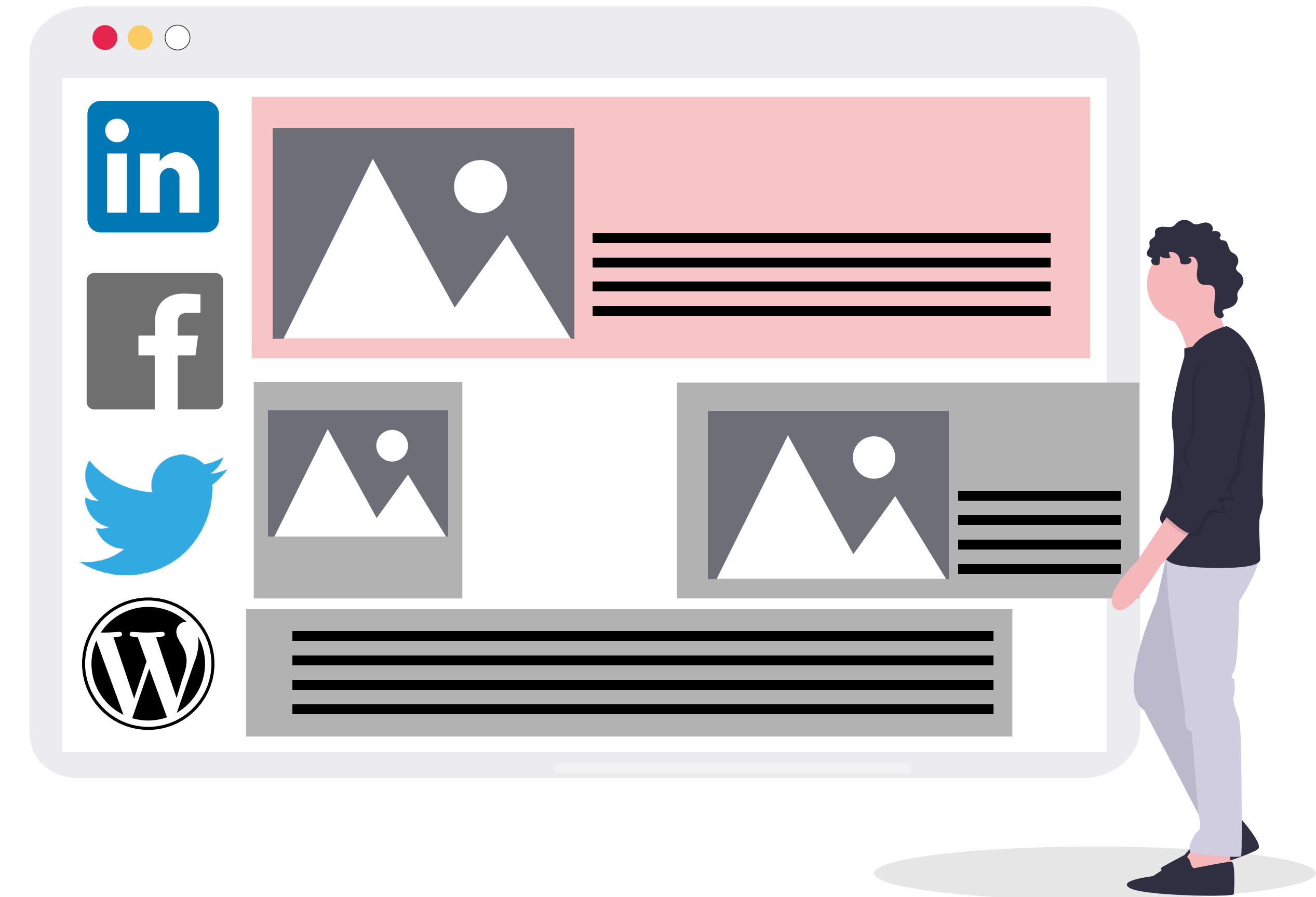
One size does not fit all

Template responsiveness and interactivity is limited by technology

One area where Smart Templates simplify graphics is variable content. They make it easy to create the same banner variants for many product variants, in different languages, for different markets.

Next to content changes, however, variations in canvas size are vital to successful digital marketing campaigns. A single campaign on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google Display Network requires dozens of different canvas sizes for every content variant. Nobody anticipated the need for so many size variants, so software packages never accommodated for them. That means a whole set of templates must be created and maintained for every campaign.

As long as absolute values remain the norm for positioning, this kind of responsiveness can only be achieved with scripting and document actions.



[CHECK OUT OUR BLOG ON SELLING ONLINE](#)

Multichannel output has silos

Each output channel needs its own kind of templates

If companies want to create graphics for multiple channels at once (think online, print, digital marketing, in-app, and large-format sign and display) they are quickly faced with the dreaded silo problem: each output channel has its own prerequisites, tools and skillsets, and they are not easily matched. Every channel's production unit is a silo.

Each output channel has its own preferred tool to do the job. Graphic designers tend to use Adobe™ Indesign™ or Illustrator, where designers working for the web prefer Dreamweaver or Sketch. Each tool has a different setup, depending on the output channel. Print files need CMYK and spot colors, for example, whereas the web requires RGB and Hex colors.

We need a single, capable tool that can deliver pixel-based RGB files for online and mm, point or inch based files for print.



Graphics don't scale well

Building templates still needs manual work

Smart Templates are already a huge step forward when compared to creating graphics manually in dedicated desktop software or the rudimentary browser-based solutions found in the market. Template builders can set up a template to swap out text and images relatively easy, or even automatically.

But when it comes to positioning frames on a canvas, things get complicated. How are they supposed to make sure a specific frame stays in the middle of the canvas as it resizes? As customer expectations grow, so does the number of required templates. And with a growing number of templates comes an inevitable increase in the workload to build them.

Achieving scale with Smart Templates hinges on being able to reduce the number of templates required and making them more universally applicable.



PART 3

Opportunity

Relative values to the rescue

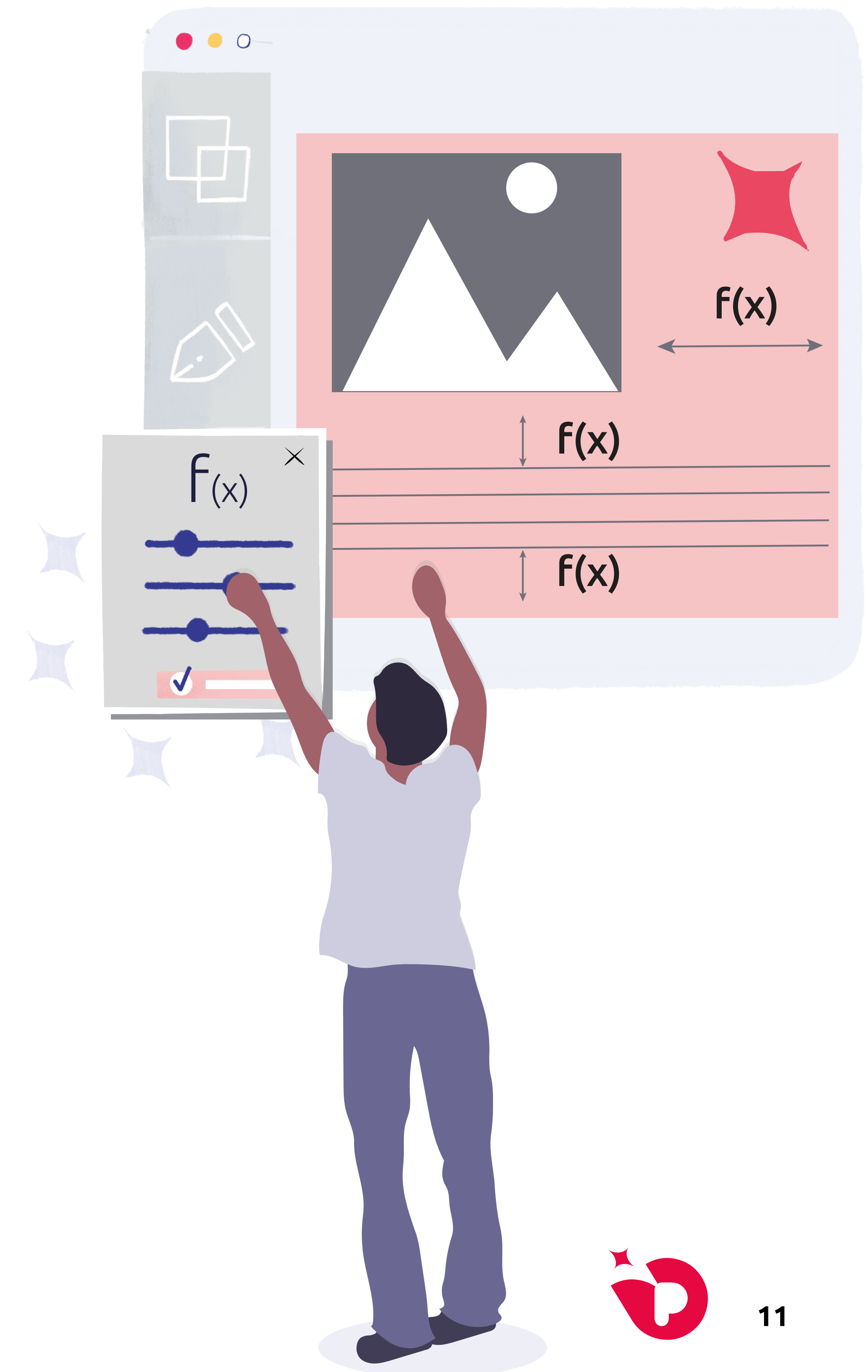
Make templates easier to build and maintain

With Dynamic Layouts, it becomes possible to use the principles from responsive web design in any type of graphic.

Instead of using absolute values, Dynamic Layouts use relative values. A simple example is positioning and sizing based on canvas size. Centering a frame on the canvas becomes as easy as setting its central handle at 50% of the canvas size. But it goes much further than that. Relative values can refer not only to canvas size, as they often do in web design, but also to any other value in the template. This could be the position, size or rotation of any other object, or a combination. They can even use references to data that is not related to anything in the template, like outside temperature, number of views, and so on.

Templates become much easier to build, maintain, and share with relative values set with simple, excel-like formulas.

CHECK OUT OUR EBOOK ON DYNAMIC LAYOUTS



Size matters

Cover many sizes with few templates

Many of the design decisions that make up a visual style or a brand are consistent over different canvas sizes. A logo usually has a fixed place relative to canvas edges, for example.

Dynamic Layouts make it possible to define these design decisions as absolute or relative values, or even a mix of both. That means a single Smart Template can easily cover variations in canvas size. Add alternate layouts that provide design variants at specific breakpoints, and it becomes possible to include all possible canvas size variants. All consistent, on-brand, and without requiring a designer's attention. Users open a template, answer some questions about the required sized and planned application, and generate output files themselves.

A single Smart Template can now generate graphics from postage stamp size to large enough to cover a building.



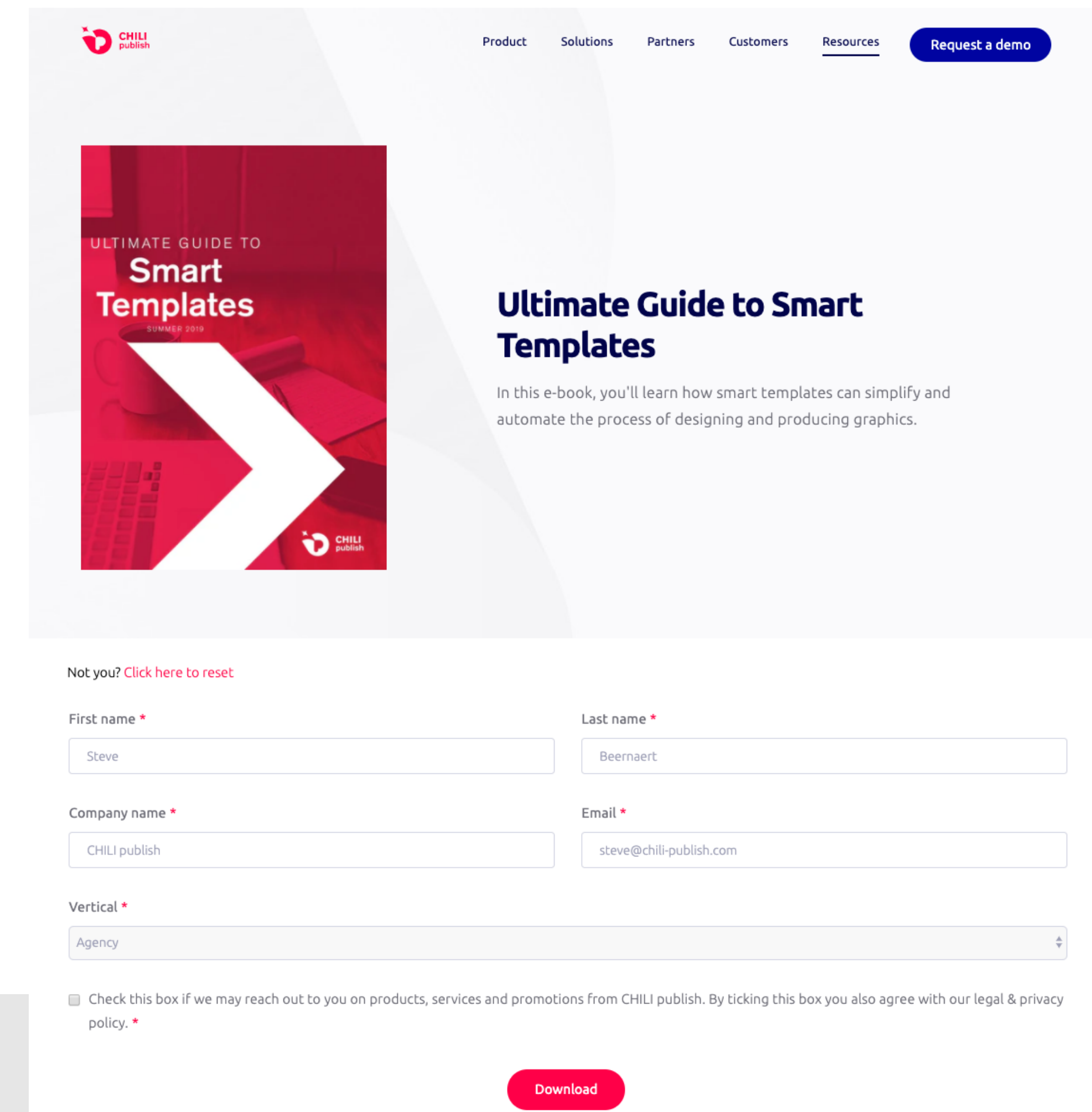
Breaking the Silos

Use a single tool for multi-channel output

Instead of needing different specialists, each with their preferred software, and all generating files with specific technical characteristics, Dynamic Layouts make it possible to build all the many different files with a single tool. They are just as capable of generating output for print as they are for online use.

A single tool for all channels puts an end to the silo approach and all of its coordination challenges. A multi-channel campaign becomes template-centric. Using an advanced Smart Template saves an enormous amount of time and resources, especially the campaign calls for multiple variants for many different languages, markets, product variants, audience groups, or even individuals.

Dynamic Layouts enable a true multi-channel approach, minus all the hassle.



The screenshot shows the CHILI publish website with a navigation bar (Product, Solutions, Partners, Customers, Resources) and a 'Request a demo' button. The main content area features a large red graphic with the text 'ULTIMATE GUIDE TO Smart Templates' and a large white arrow pointing right. Below this, the text reads: 'Ultimate Guide to Smart Templates' and 'In this e-book, you'll learn how smart templates can simplify and automate the process of designing and producing graphics.'

Below the graphic is a form with the following fields:

- First name * (Steve)
- Last name * (Beernaert)
- Company name * (CHILI publish)
- Email * (steve@chili-publish.com)
- Vertical * (Agency)

At the bottom of the form, there is a checkbox: 'Check this box if we may reach out to you on products, services and promotions from CHILI publish. By ticking this box you also agree with our legal & privacy policy. *'. A red 'Download' button is located at the bottom right of the form.



CHECK OUT OUR SMART TEMPLATES GUIDE

www.chili-publish.com/document-ultimate-guide-to-smart-templates

Conclusion

We use archaic methods of building graphics to this day. Specialized graphics software builds output files by positioning elements on a canvas, with absolute values determining position, scale, and rotation of each component. This work, and any subsequent changes to it, requires an advanced skill set and intimate knowledge of production requirements.

Any changes to size, content, or channel are likely to need the hand of a skilled designer. A design bottleneck limits scale and output capacity, though: there are only so many designers available, and the only solution for these bandwidth limits is adding extra sets of hands.

When Smart Templates include Dynamic Layouts, however, things change. With relative and calculated values, it becomes possible to deliver graphics at scale. A single template can generate many different variants for multiple channels without the need for the designer to intervene.

Users can self-service for multiple channels, as Smart Templates with Dynamic Layouts take care of the brand governance, design integrity, and everything needed to accommodate for different output dimensions. Like magic, a single template shape-shifts and optimizes automatically.

Dynamic Layouts take a template-based approach to the next level.

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