



FLAGPOST: A PLACE FOR NEW ZEALANDERS TO REIMAGINE THEIR FLAG, TOGETHER

Thomas Le Bas

New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

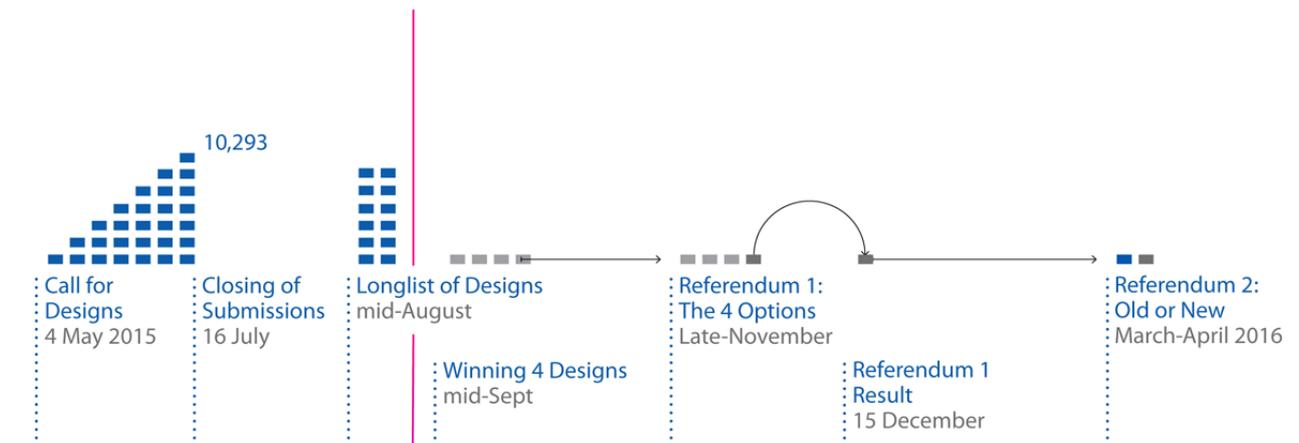
I am a Master of Design candidate from Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. Today I will be walking you through my research work to date, all of which revolves around **Flagpost: a place for New Zealanders to reimagine their flag, together.**



My research is conducted in the context of the New Zealand Flag Consideration Process. In 2014 the New Zealand Government initiated the process, outlining a proposal for two referendums where New Zealanders would vote on preferred designs and whether to change the flag or not.

New Zealanders would vote on preferred designs and whether to change the flag or not.

Flag Consideration Process



Fast-forward to the present day, and we are already part-way through the process. The process timeline features a handful of important milestones. The call for designs from the public was made in early May 2015, and closed mid-July. In that time, an impressive total of 10,293 were submitted.

More recently, a long-list of finalists was made public, and will again shortly be whittled down to a final four designs. These final four will be put in the first Referendum for the public of New Zealand to vote on in late November/ early December 2015. Voted in preferential order, with the most preferred design announced in December. This winning design will go head-to-head with the current New Zealand flag in the second and final referendum in March/April 2016. The pink line of course represents where we currently are in this process.

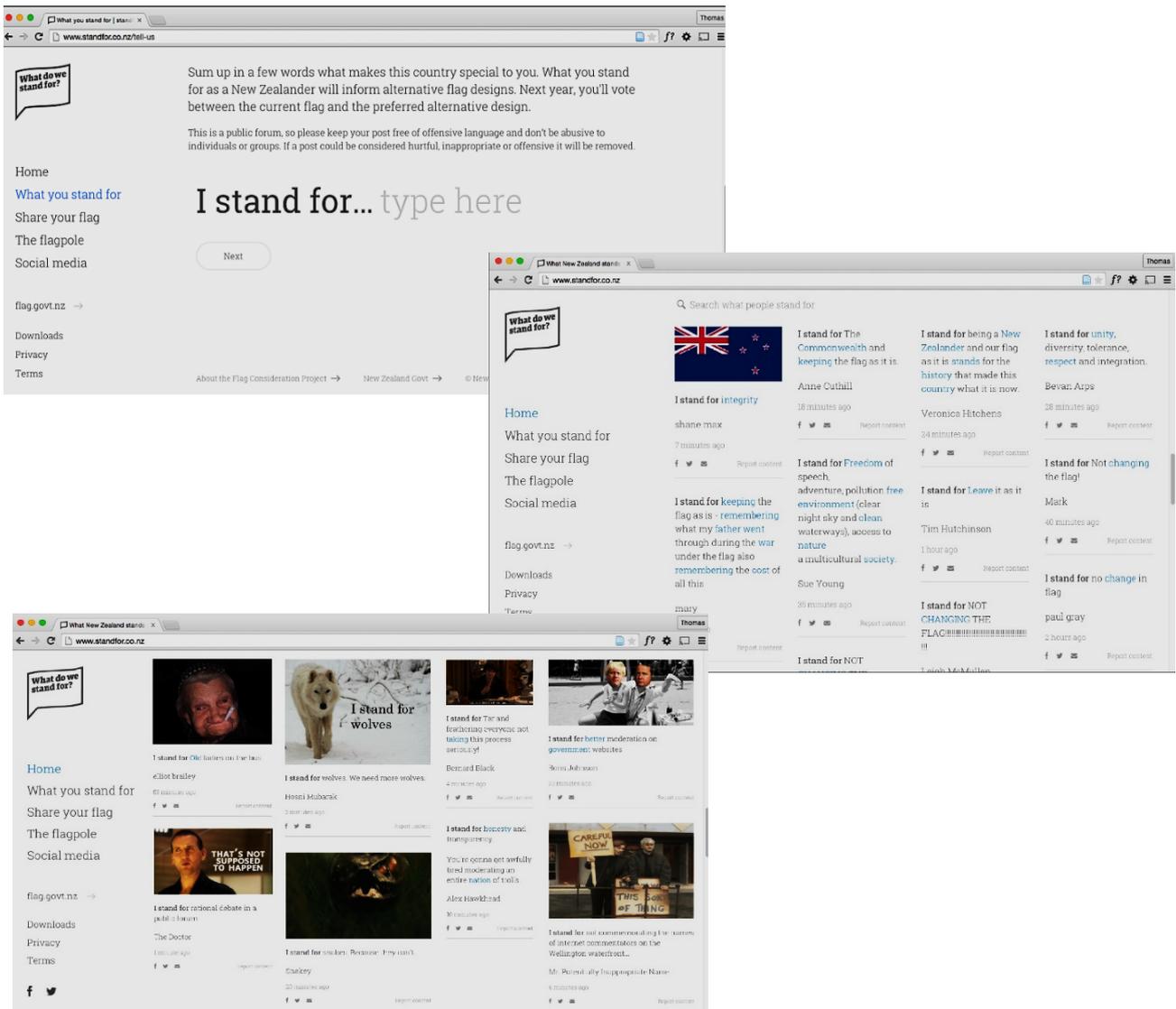
FLAG CONSIDERATION PANEL

A key aspect of the process, almost at the centre of it, is the Flag Consideration Panel. An apolitical group of 12 high-profile New Zealanders representative of age, regional, gender and ethnic demographics. The Panel members came from all walks of life; including a writer, a millionaire, a former Rugby player, and the CEO of a prominent advertising company. It is also worth noting that they have no designers or experts of visual semiotics on the Panel, but it does have a notable New Zealand flag historian. Their role is to lead the public engagement aspect of the process; helping the public be aware and informed of the process going on, as well as taking part in it. The Panel can also commission designs, which are then promulgated for public feedback. The core responsibility for the Panel is the final selection of the flags to be put into the first referendum.

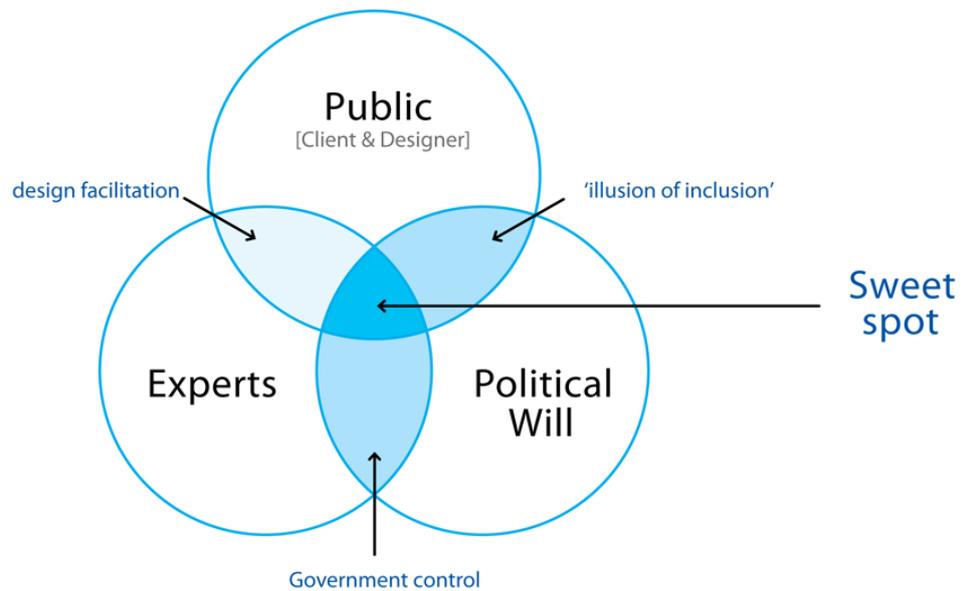
Taking into account this context, and quite importantly the short timeline(!), I had started to question the relevance of the Panel and their ability to make that selection. As a democratic process, the Panel was a weakness in that ideal - how can 12 people truly represent and inform New Zealand's collective identity? The research question I formed early in the process then became: how can a design process facilitate the democratic determination of collective identity? Or more contextually: can the public be included in the selection process and thus help determine the final flags?

THE PANEL'S DIGITAL PRESENCE

The Panel understood that there needed to be something in the space of digital engagement with the public and themselves. They formed two websites: **What do we stand for?** and the **Flag submissions gallery**. The first of the two was, in some way, focussed on answering the same question I had. The Stand For site asked the public to offer their perspective of what it means to be a New Zealander, what values they hold, what is important to them.

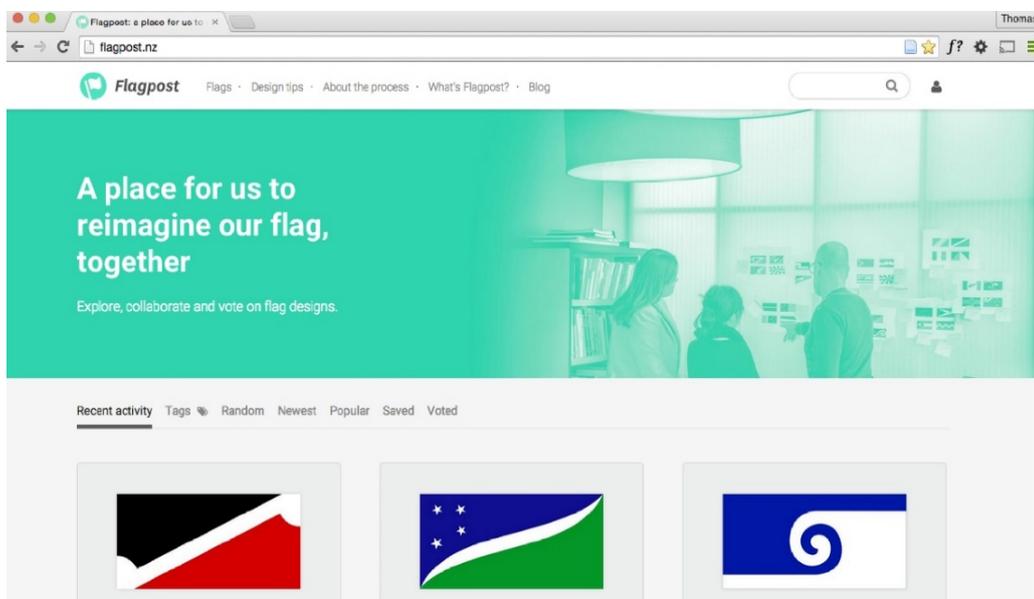


Context



It is in this convergent space that *Flagpost* was conceived. *Flagpost* became “an initiative to design and develop an on-line platform that facilitates dialogue, open collaboration and speculation on the design and determination of a new New Zealand flag”. It aimed to be:

- Inclusive and Approachable,
- Informative and Provocative,
- Participative and Collaborative,
- Social and Sharable,
- Insightful and Impactful, and
- Adaptable



So, in a very short timeframe, in reaction to the Government's websites, *Flagpost* was developed. Working with a local web development company, we designed and built the web tool as a way for New Zealanders to explore, discuss and vote on the flag submissions.

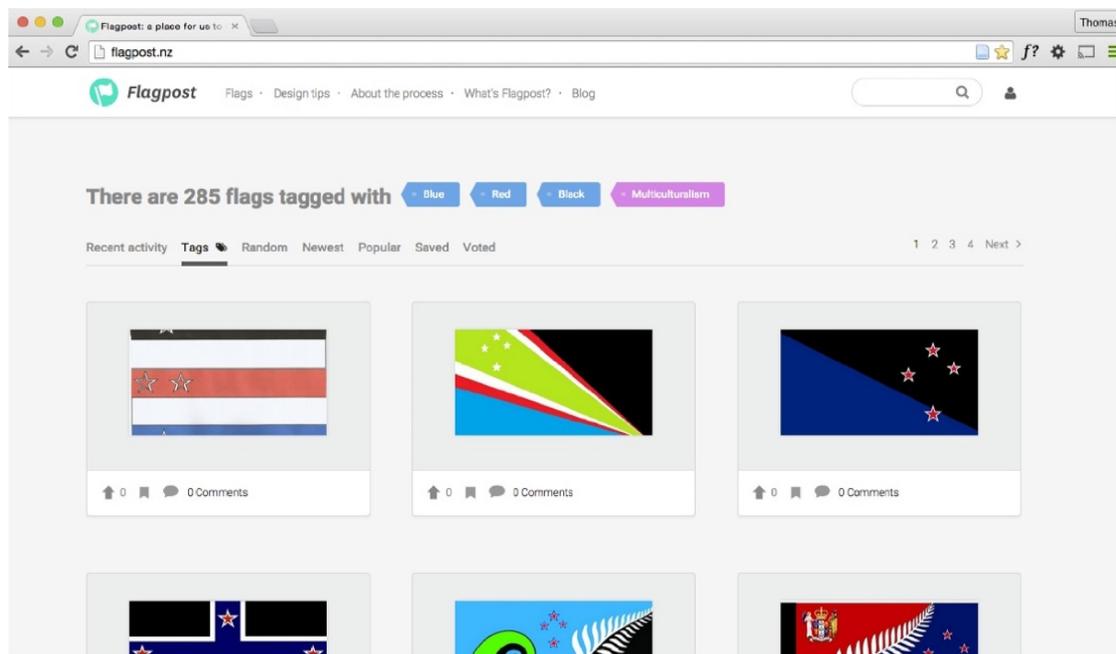
Flagpost (www.flagpost.nz) is as a web tool to give a space for the public to have their say on New Zealand flag design submissions. The platform facilitates informed decisions, dialogue, and open collaboration surround at a national scale. Grounded in semiotic theory, the project looks to connect flag design solutions and process to people's own values of national identity, and have those insights inform the official decision

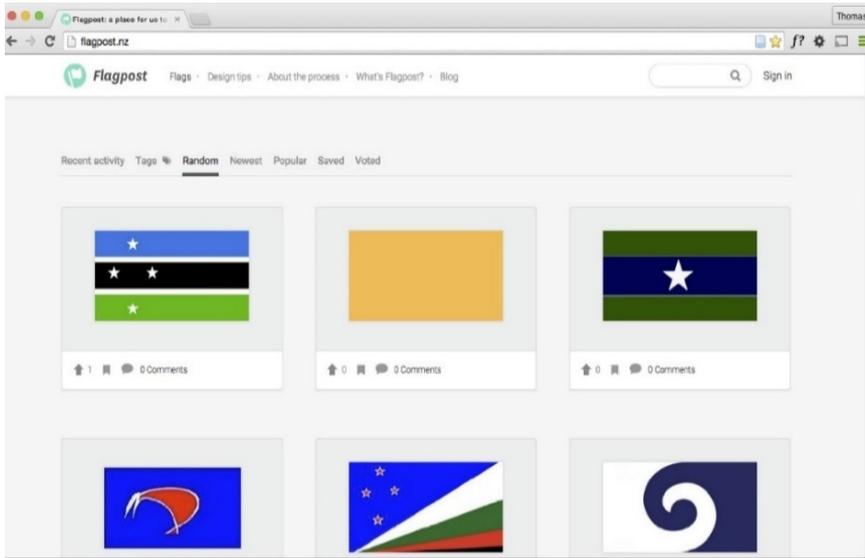
process - input into the process that would otherwise be lacking. *Flagpost* offers Kiwis a place to reimagine the New Zealand flag, on their own terms, with their own voice.



In a way, the crux of the tool was the tags. This provided a number of advantages. Given the thousands of designs available upon launch, tags enabled the public to find flags that were relevant to their interests.

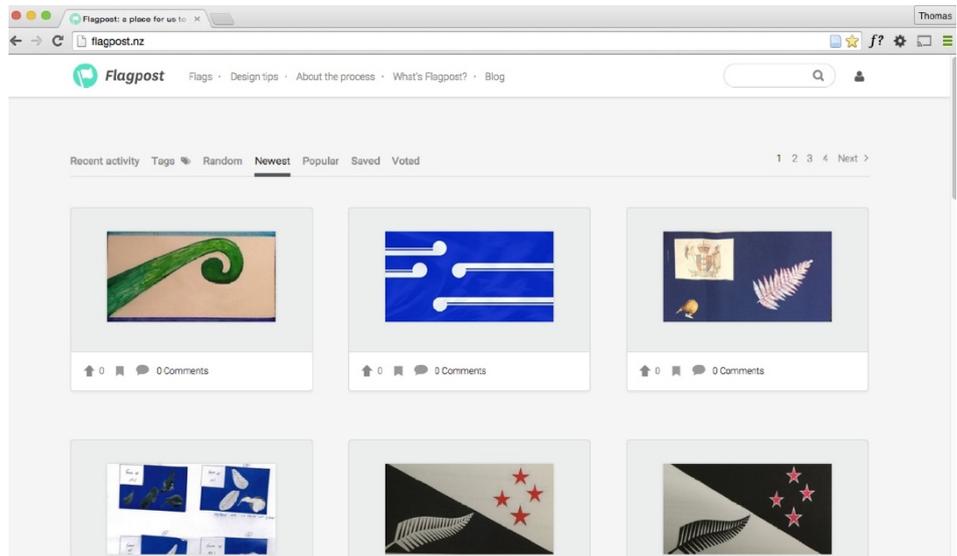
For example, here I've selected 4 tags, and that has provided a smaller list of 285 flags to explore through.



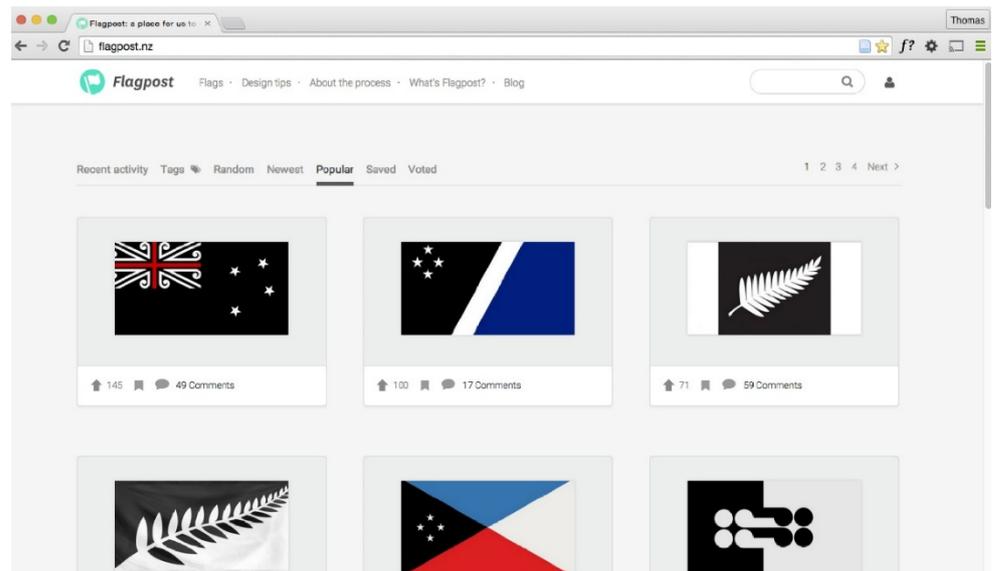


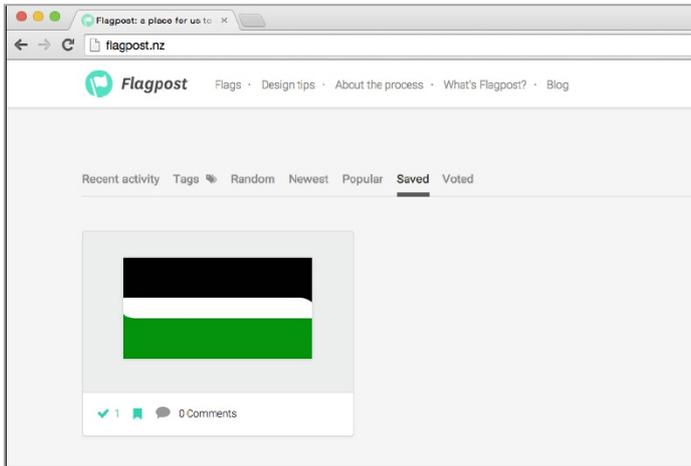
By default, however, we have a Random view. This also enables the discovery of older flags and allows visitors to see something different every visit.

Alongside that, we enable a more chronological view of the submissions, ordered by Newest first.



Given that we allow for users to vote on submissions, *Flagpost* can also show the most popular flags.

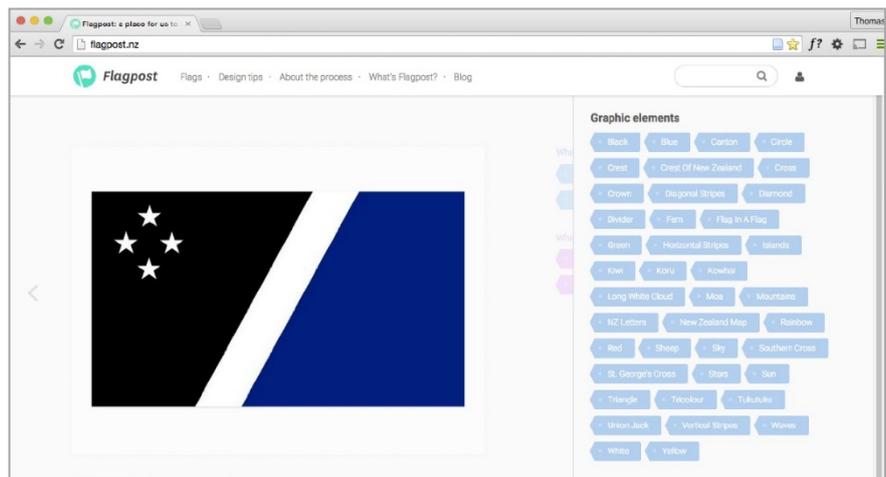




For frequent users and visitors and the thousands of flags, we also anticipated a need to save flags or find the ones you had voted on already.

When selecting a flag, you get this view.

This is also where the other aspect of tags comes in. Tags are given as responses by the public, the idea being that this adds to the texture of the design and aid in others understanding it. The tags are divided based on semiotic theory; there are the graphic elements, and the values and meanings that could be associated with them. The goal



being that we get an understanding of the public's perception of designs at a rudimentary level, and can then correlate those associations with the popularity of designs.

Additionally, we were able to show designs by designers of the same name, and even designs that were related (usually by other designs that referenced the designer).

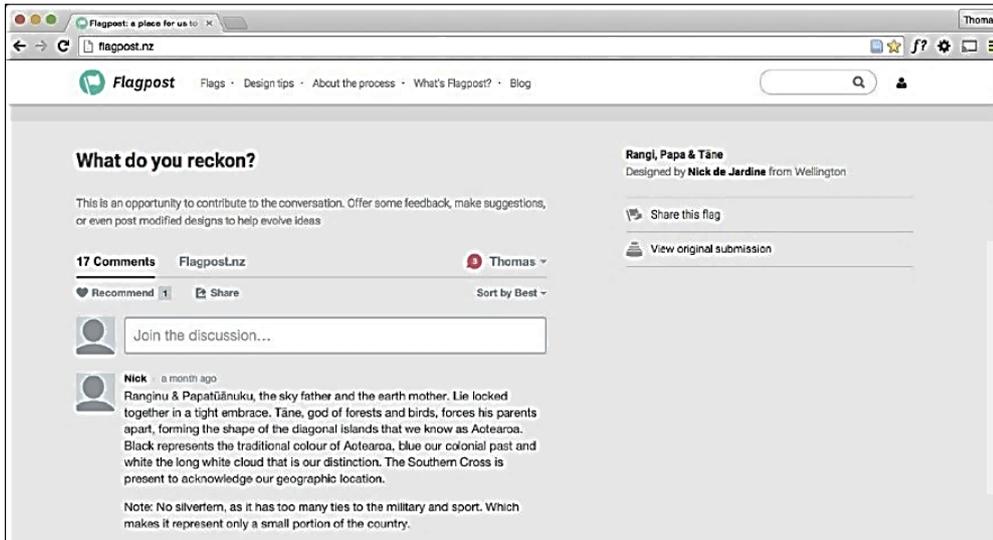
Every submission came with a description or rationale from the submitter.

Rangini & Papatūānuku, the sky father and the earth mother lie locked together in a tight embrace. Tāne, god of forests and birds, forces his parents apart, forming the shape of the diagonal islands that we know as Aotearoa. Black represents the traditional colour of Aotearoa, blue our colonial past and white the long white cloud that is our distinction. The Southern Cross is present to acknowledge our geographical location.

The more popular aspect of *Flagpost* has been, however, the ability to discuss the flags. This was envisioned as a space to offer critique, advice, suggestions, and even visual responses to aid that design process - at least until submissions close.

Fortunately, we were not the only ones looking at design process in this space. Fellow designers of mine had worked on a web tool called *Flagtest* and we were able to collaborate on embedding it as a feature of *Flagpost*.

Simply clicking on the “Test this flag” button took you to *Flagtest*.

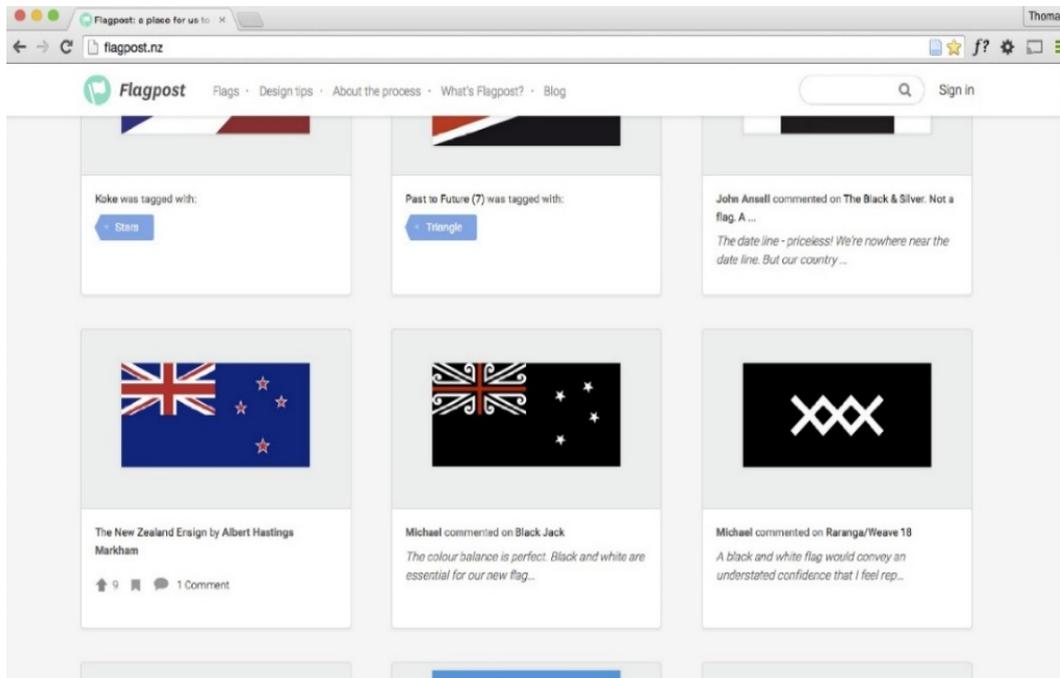
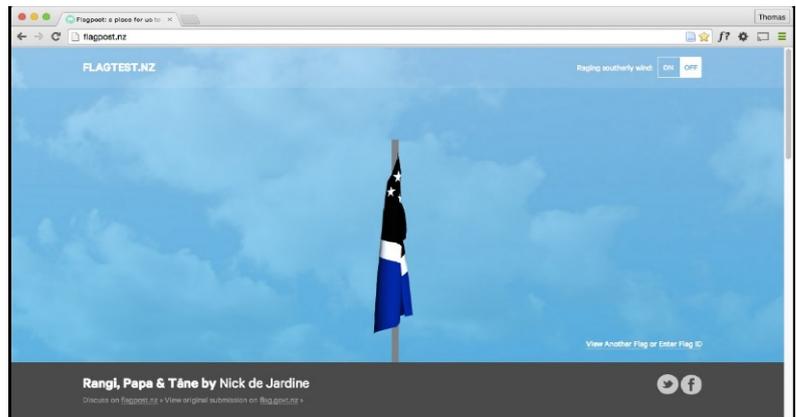


... and presented the design in a digital flag simulation. Either in a raging wind....
 ... or none at all.

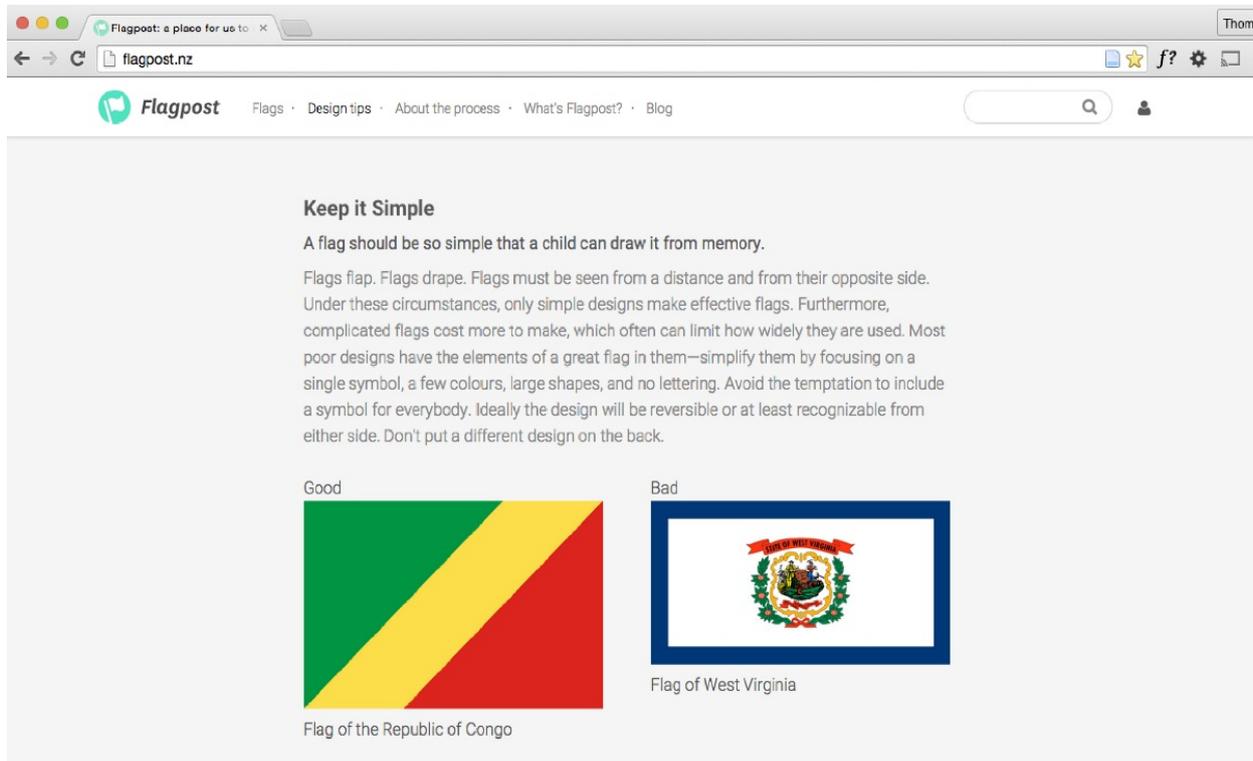


This enabled designers and the general public to assess the suitability of flag designs in realistic form.

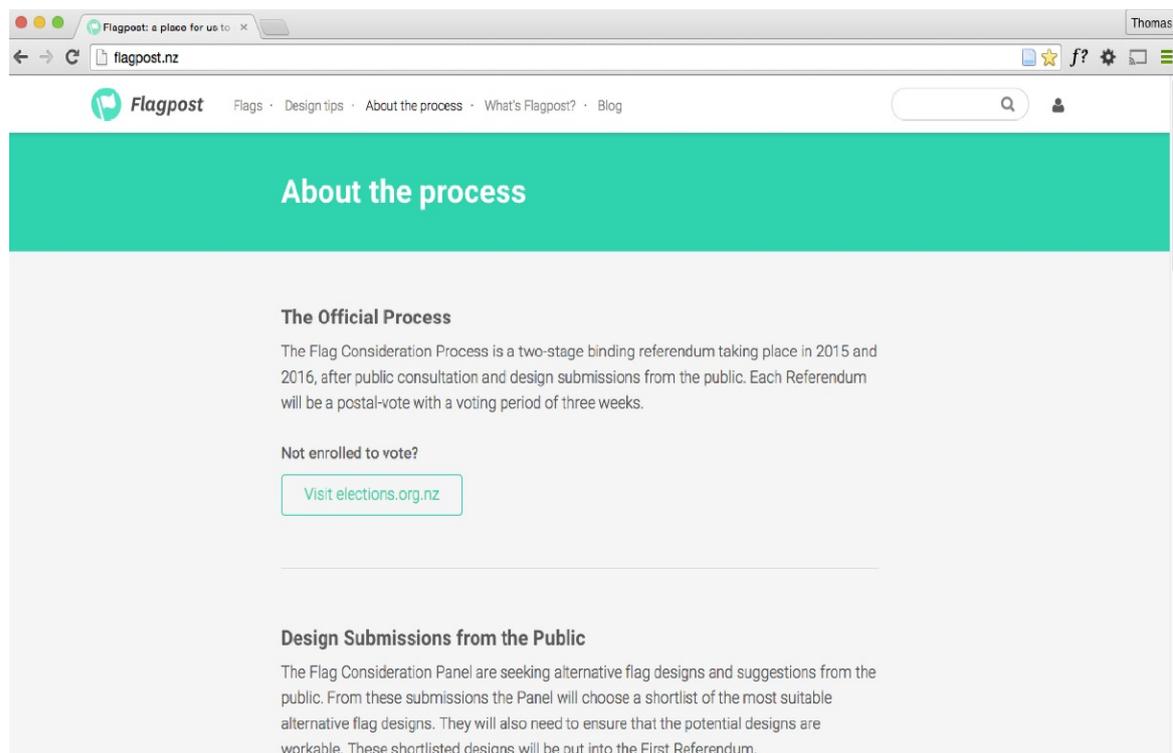
To make sure visitors could find where conversation was happening, we also featured recent activity on the home page. This consisted of recent comments on flags, and recent tags added to flags.



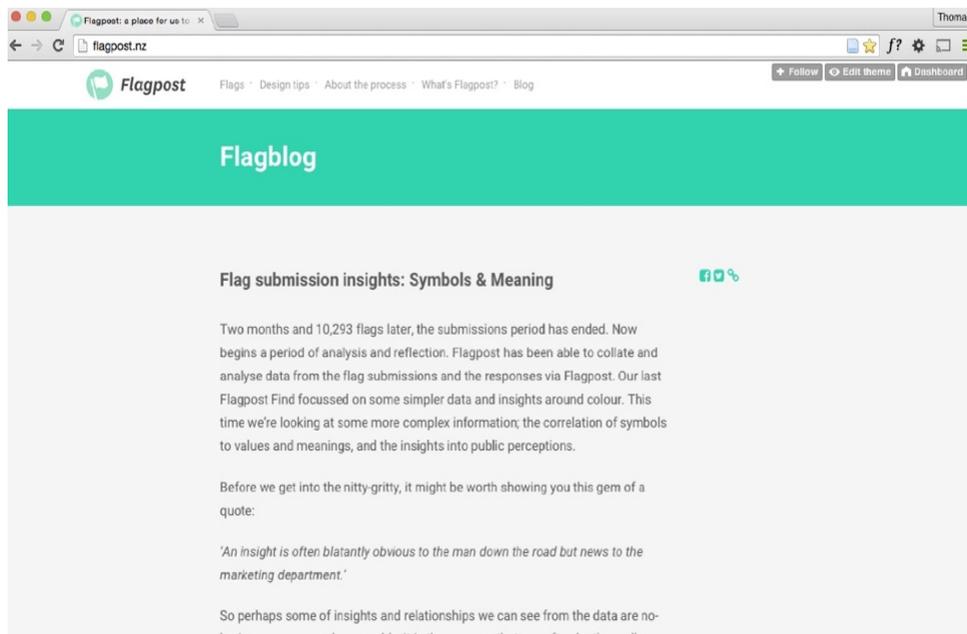
The flags aside, *Flagpost* also became a resource. We provided design tips based on content from *Good Flag, Bad Flag* by Ted Kaye; which gave a great overview of simple principles to consider in both designing flags, and assessing them.



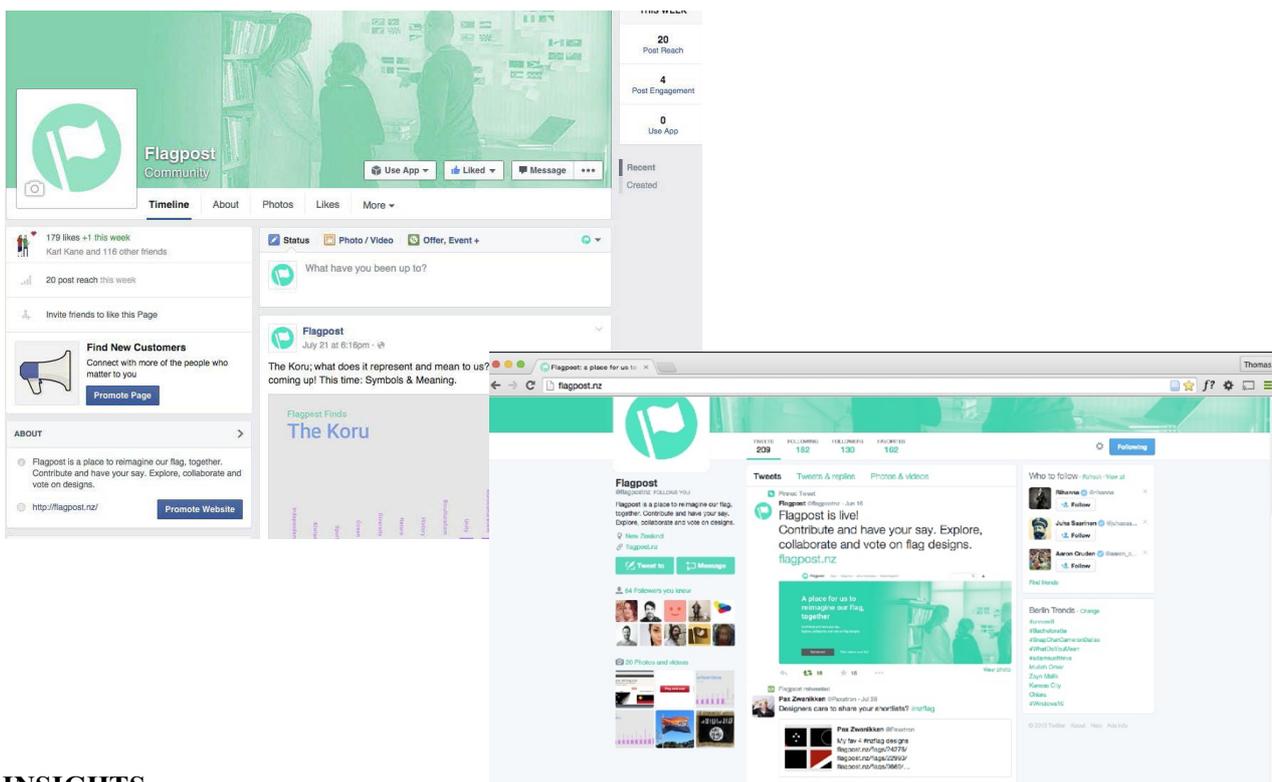
We felt it was also important to have an outline of the official process. This was to aid the public's understanding of how they can participate, and time frames of the referendums.



In addition, we also formed a blog. This was a way to help provide content and resources more frequently. We also used this to publish findings and insights gathered through *Flagpost*.

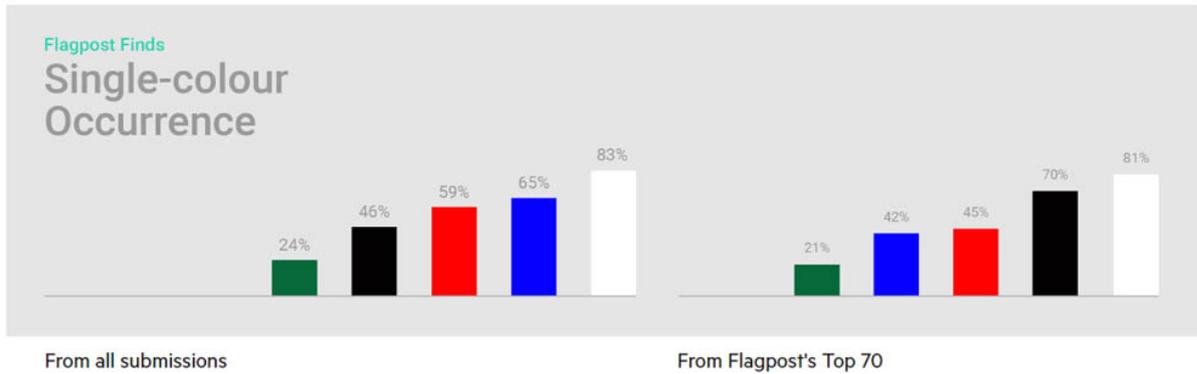


In an effort to communicate and engage the public with *Flagpost*, we took to social media. Traditional media also took an interest and managed to make some headlines there.

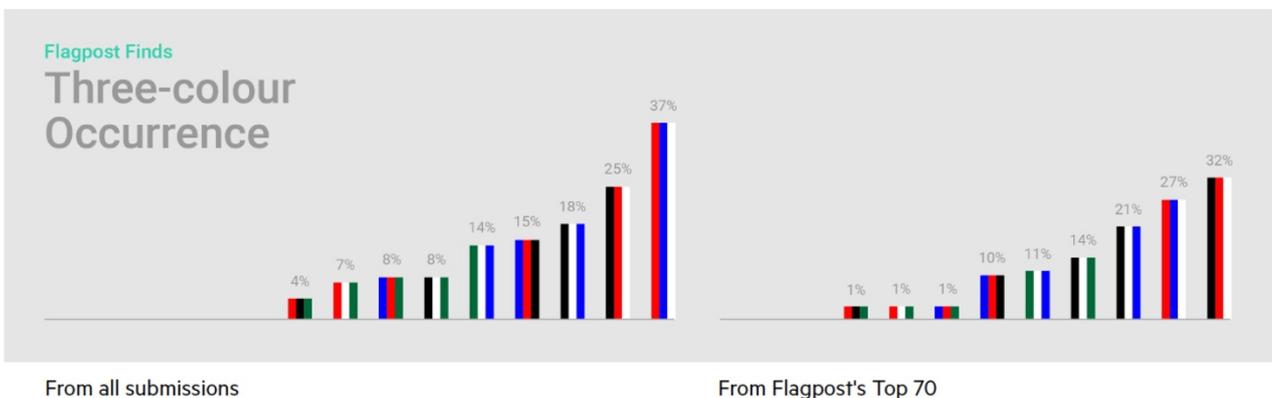
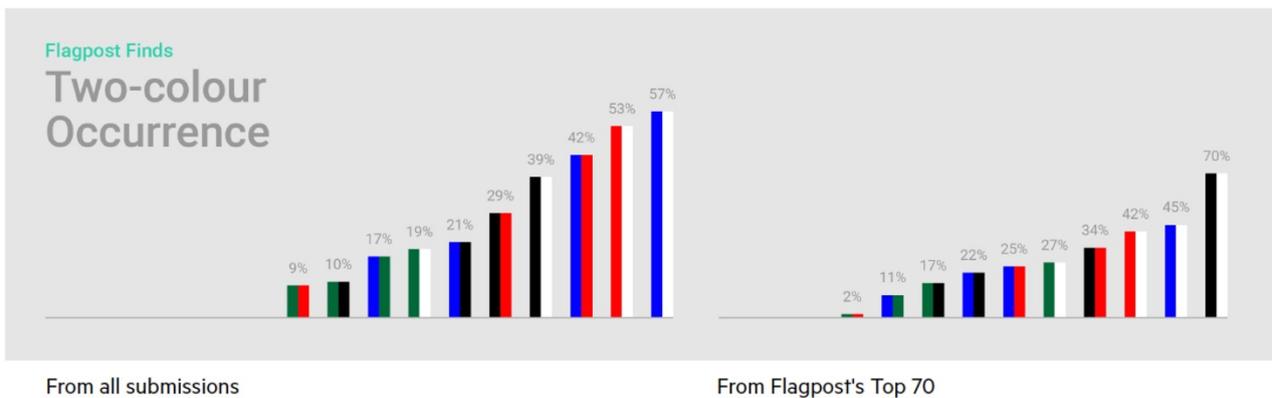


INSIGHTS

Having created *Flagpost*, accomplishing what we think has been a successful platform for participating and inclusion in the process, we started to pull together data from the flags. From this data, we were able to form some insights on colour, symbols, and their associated meaning. In this case, we get an overview of colour occurrence through all submissions, and through the top 70 flags on *Flagpost*. This particular information was unexpected for me as it showed that despite talk about change, colours in the existing flag were still very prominent. But as expected, more votes were in favour of the black and white.



Colour combinations could also be measured, reflecting similar outcome from a single colour.



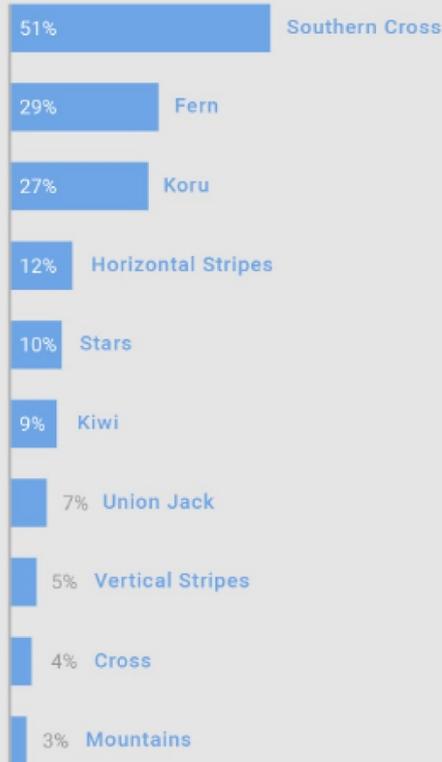
We could also measure the occurrence of symbols throughout the submissions and those most voted on, with the Southern Cross, Fern, and Koru the most frequent.

Flagpost Finds

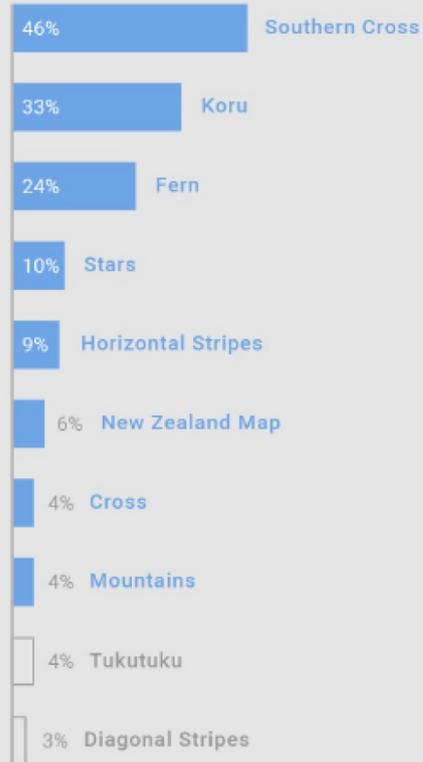
Common Symbols

Insights Symbolism & Meaning

From all submissions

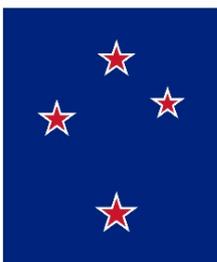


From Flagpost's Top 70



What *Flagpost* could also help show was the relationship between symbols and meaning. The Southern Cross:

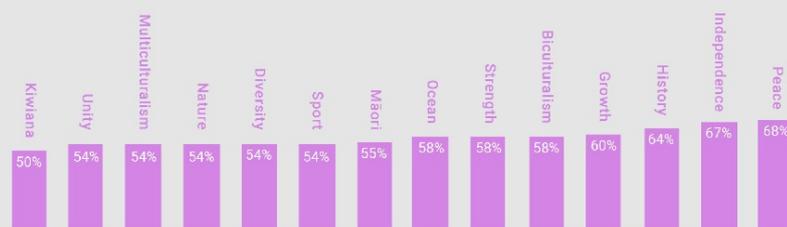
Insights Symbolism & Meaning



Flagpost Finds

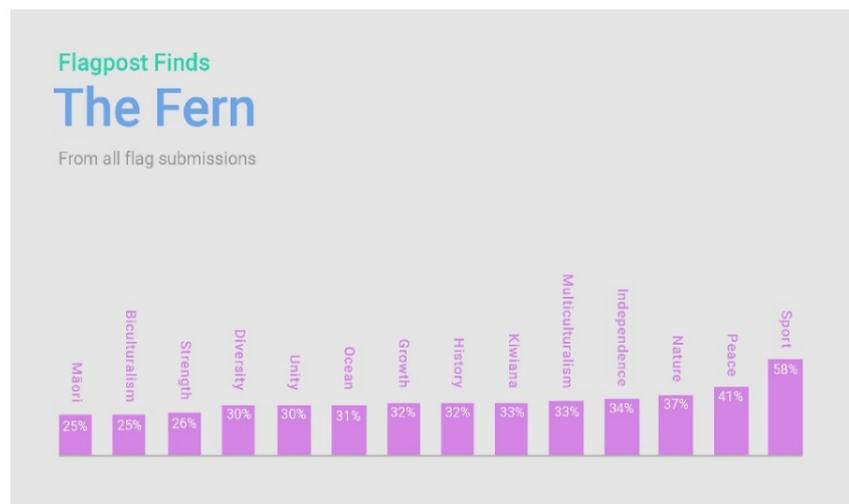
The Southern Cross

From all flag submissions



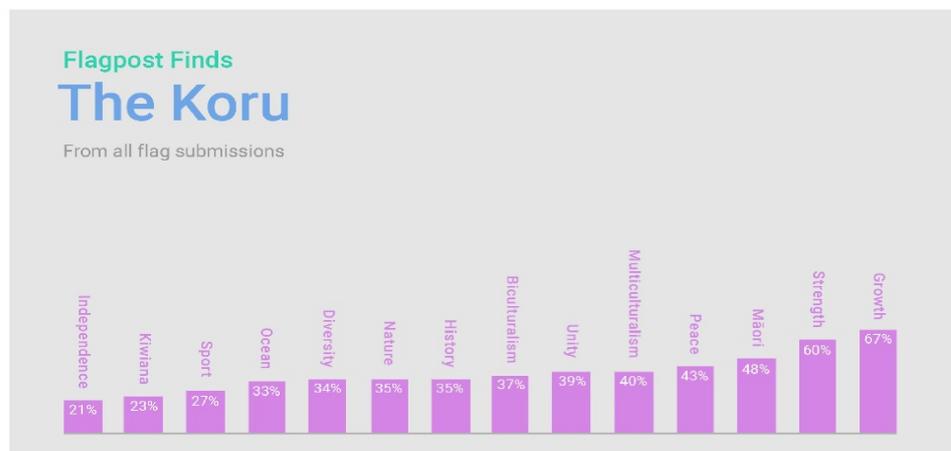
The Fern on the other hand, showed to be mostly associated with Sport, Peace, and Nature, and least associated with Maori, Biculturalism and Strength.

Insights
Symbolism
& Meaning



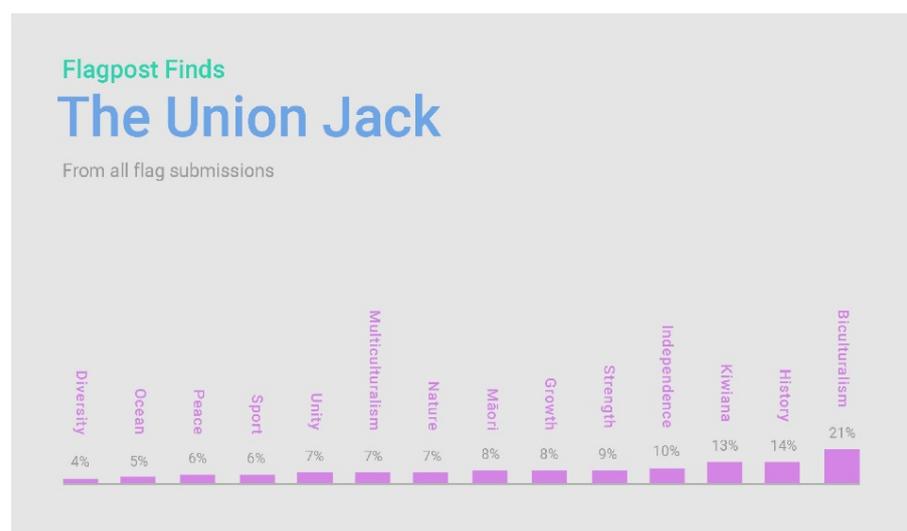
The Koru tended to be mostly associated with growth, strength, and Maori, and least associated with Independence.

Insights
Symbolism
& Meaning



The Union Jack, generally the point of contention of our current flag, was shown to be used in reference to our bi-cultural narrative and is associated with history.

Insights
Symbolism
& Meaning



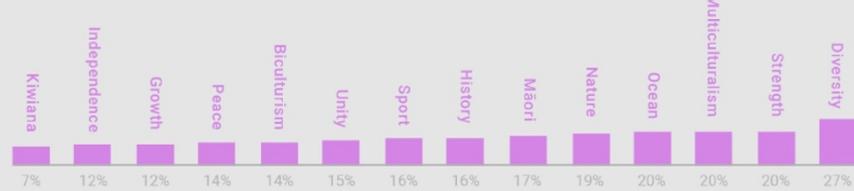
Stripes were of course present throughout the submissions. Horizontal stripes were twice as common as Vertical stripes, and tended to be conveying diversity, strength and multiculturalism.

Flagpost Finds

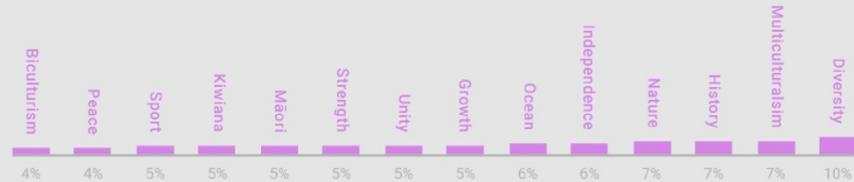
Stripes: Horizontal vs. Vertical

From all flag submissions

Horizontal Stripes



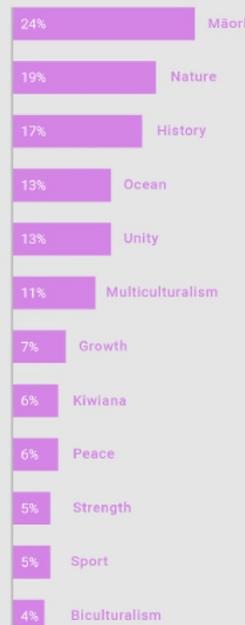
Vertical Stripes



Flagpost Finds

Common Values & Meanings

From all submissions



From Flagpost's Top 70



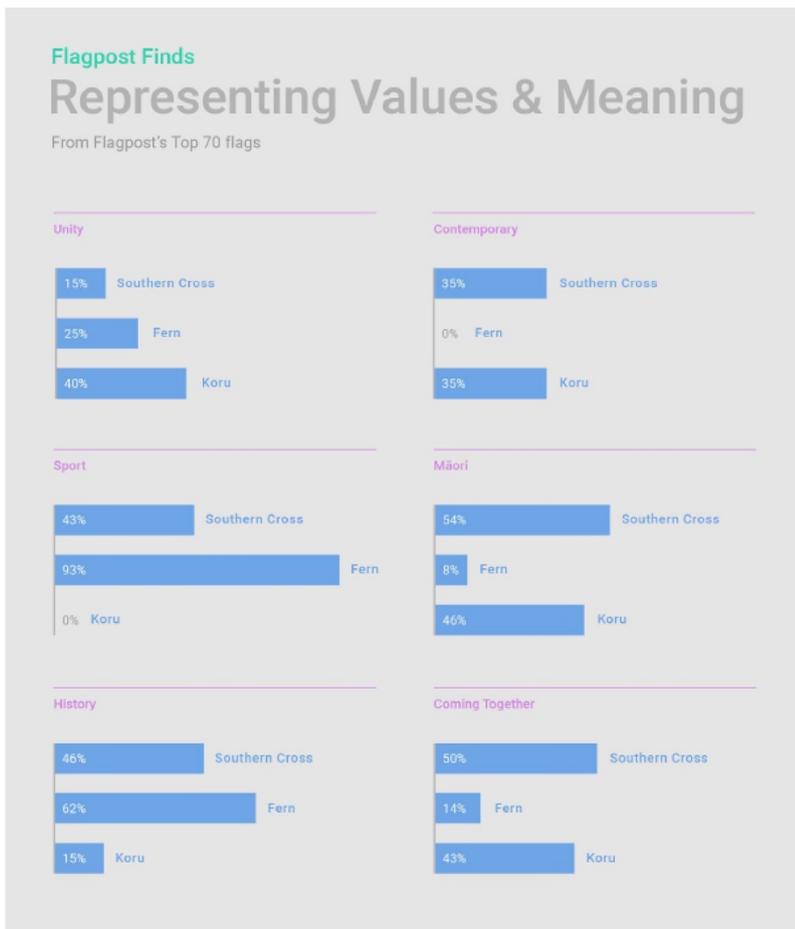
Overall, common values and meaning were:

Māori 24%,
Nature 19%,
History 17%,
the Ocean 13%,
Unity 13%, and
Multiculturalism (11%).

Amongst *Flagpost's* top flags the most common were:

Nature 34%,
Unity 29%,
Contemporary 24%,
Sport 20%,
Coming Together 20%,
Māori 19%,
History 19%,
The Ocean 19%,
Strength 19%,
Independence 17%, and
Growth 16%

Although slightly harder, from the data we had we could pull together some understanding of which symbols best associate with what meanings. Because of the data, we could only show the top three symbols: Southern Cross, Fern, and Koru.



From this we get:

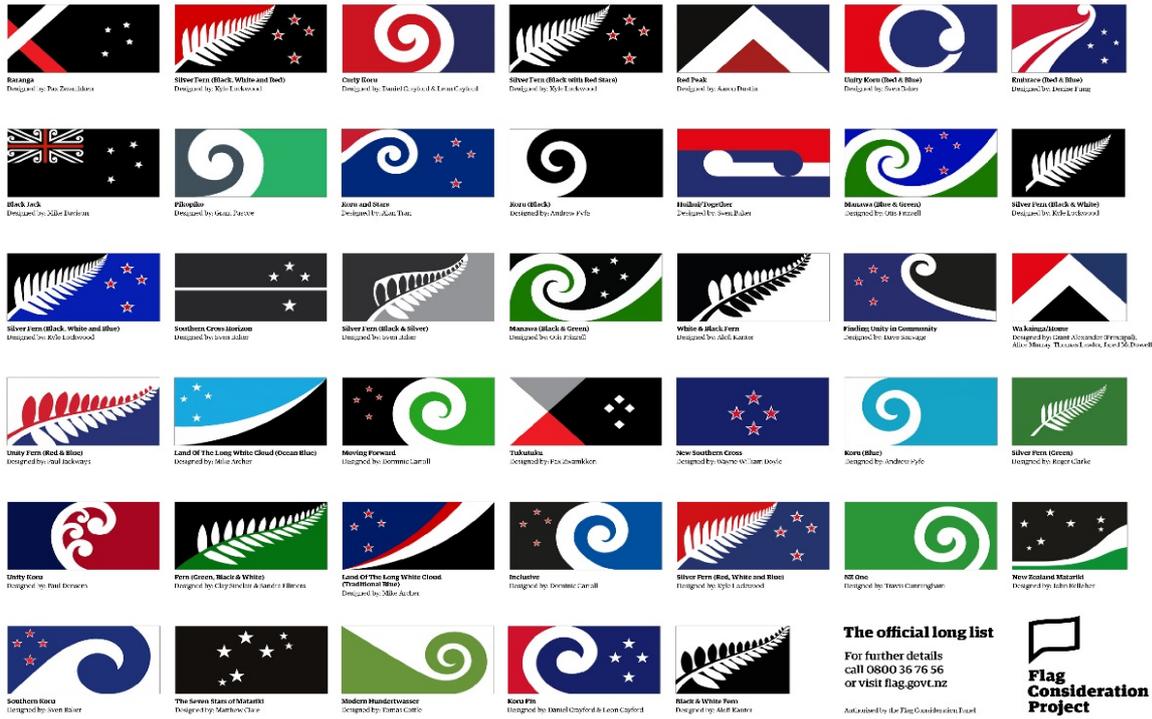
- Koru as best to convey Unity.
- Southern Cross and Koru were equally contemporary.
- the Fern not being a contemporary symbol at all but extremely related to sport.
- The Southern Cross unexpectedly highly associated with Maori.
- The Fern and Southern Cross conveying History, and
- the Southern Cross and Koru conveying a sense of Coming Together.

USING THE INSIGHTS

So, to conclude this presentation, I must say the work is still not finished. The consideration for change is still in process, but with *Flagpost* we are still looking to cater for a conversation space that isn't existing elsewhere and producing insights like this. The longlist of finalists is our new phase. However, there two opportunities we saw with these insights:

- First is **using these insights to help reduce the 10,000 flags to the finalists**. Sadly, this has not been responded to by the Flag Consideration Panel.
- The other is the **opportunity to inform a design process**. Individual designs informed and influenced by public perception of visuals and meaning. Armed with these insights, can better, more appropriate and meaningful flags be designed?
- Both of these insights offer a new and meaningful way to design with a collective, through dialogue, inclusion, openness and collaboration.

THE CONSIDERATION PANEL'S SHORTLIST OF 40:

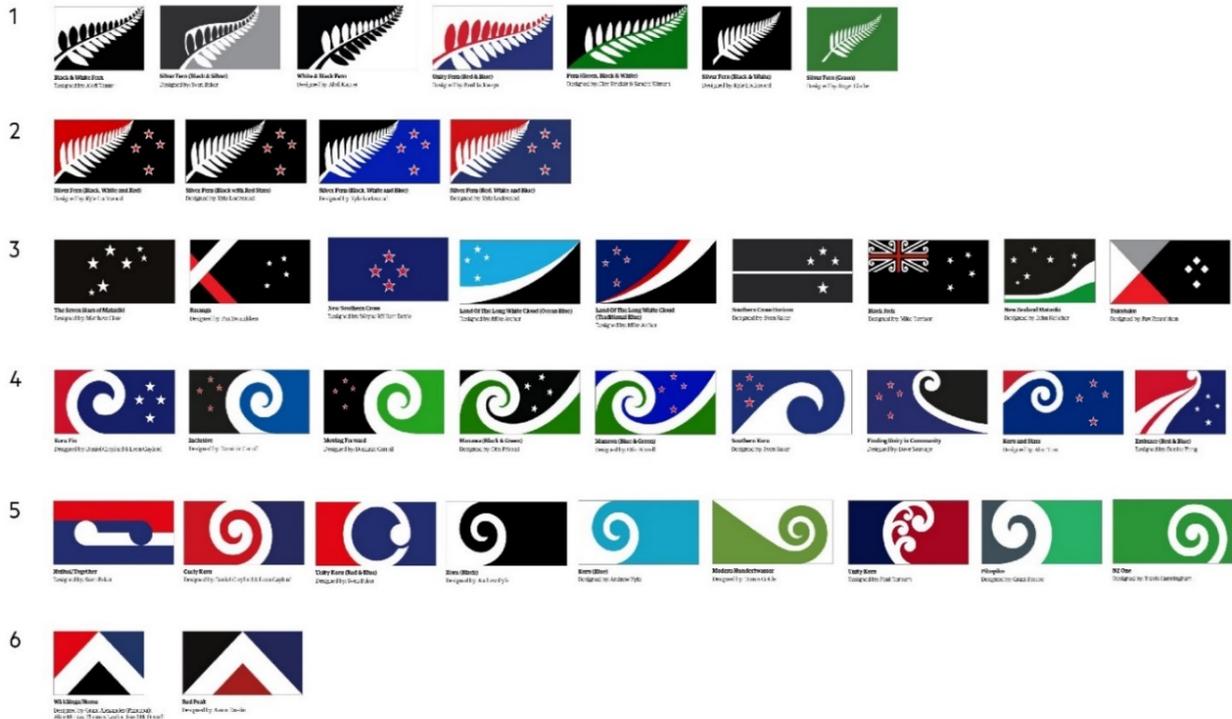


Flagpost / Thomas Le Bas

26th International Congress of Vexillology, Sydney

3 September 2015

The same 40 designs rearranged by theme – Fern, Southern Cross, Koru and “Other”:



Flagpost / Thomas Le Bas

26th International Congress of Vexillology, Sydney

3 September 2015

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The short list of 40 following *Flagpost* criteria:

Flagpost
Top 40



Flagpost / Thomas Le Bas

24th International Congress of Vexillology, Sydney

7 September 2015

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www.flagpost.nz

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