

teach people how to think, not think for them. Figure.NZ wants to create intuitive experiences, not user manuals.

Figure.NZ believes data and visuals should be useful. They provide their customers with a data collection template and teach them why it's important and how to use it. They've begun putting more emphasis on tracking what users of their website want. They also get requests from social media and through email for them to share data for a specific topic—for example, can you share data for water quality? If they have the data, they respond quickly; if they don't, they try and identify the organizations that would have that data and forge a relationship so they can be included on Figure.NZ's site. Overall, Figure.NZ is seeking to provide a place for people to be curious about, access, and interpret data on topics they are interested in.

Lillian has a deep and profound vision for Figure.NZ that goes well beyond simply providing open-data services. She says things are different now. "We used to live in a world where it was really hard to share information widely. And in that world, the best future was created by having a few great leaders who essentially had access to the information and made decisions on behalf of others, whether it was on behalf of a country or companies.

"But now we live in a world where it's really easy to share information widely and also to communicate widely. In the world we live in now, the best future is the one where everyone can make well-informed decisions.

"The use of numbers and data as a way of making well-informed decisions is one of the areas where there is the biggest gaps. We don't really use numbers as a part of our thinking and part of our understanding yet.

"Part of the reason is the way data is spread across hundreds of sites. In addition, for the most part, deep thinking based on data is constrained to experts because most people don't have data literacy. There once was a time

when many citizens in society couldn't read or write. However, as a society, we've now come to believe that reading and writing skills should be something all citizens have. We haven't yet adopted a similar belief around numbers and data literacy. We largely still believe that only a few specially trained people can analyze and think with numbers.

"Figure.NZ may be the first organization to assert that *everyone* can use numbers in their thinking, and it's built a technological platform along with trust and a network of relationships to make that possible. What you can see on Figure.NZ are tens of thousands of graphs, maps, and data.

"Figure.NZ sees this as a new kind of alphabet that can help people analyze what they see around them. A way to be thoughtful and informed about society. A means of engaging in conversation and shaping decision making that transcends personal experience. The long-term value and impact is almost impossible to measure, but the goal is to help citizens gain understanding and work together in more informed ways to shape the future."

Lillian sees Figure.NZ's model as having global potential. But for now, their focus is completely on making Figure.NZ work in New Zealand and to get the "network effect"—users dramatically increasing value for themselves and for others through use of their service. Creative Commons is core to making the network effect possible.

Web links

- 1 www.nzdatafutures.org.nz/sites/default/files/NZDFF_harness-the-power.pdf
- 2 www.ict.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/open-government/new-zealand-government-open-access-and-licensing-nzgoal-framework/
- 3 figure.nz/business/
- 4 figure.nz/patrons/