

A Brief History Of Kiwicon Visual Design

Circa mid 2016, prior to Kiwicon X

In which Metl recounts the story of Kiwicon 1-9's visual design.

Kiwicon 1: “Spread the Knowledge”

The original Kiwicon's core art was a stylised Kiwifruit, and eventually this settled on an early ascii art kiwifruit on the website (the background sunset photo being taken from Bogan's house!):



This matured (heh) into the artwork for the tshirts, and what is the enduring legacy of Kiwicon 1, the goatse-themed “Kiwise”, and the strapline “Spread the Knowledge”, here on the back of the tshirt. (When people ask “where’s the ring”, we know they’re srs goatse aficionados)

There was also a kiwicon-with-lines thing used on the front of the shirts, and in the handbook.



These also got mixed and matched in other treatments; the posters, handbooks etc:



(As an added coda, the Kiwicon 1 art and “kiwise” was featured in none less than Australian “Men’s Style” magazine, haha, the actual fuck? <http://2008.kiwicon.org/images/Menstyle.pdf> with a byline of one “Patrick Gray”, which would perhaps become ... significant later in the story)

Kiwicon 2: “Two Cons, One Vision”

Kiwicon 2 expanded on the gross internet memes idea, co-opting the then “popular” “two girls, one cup” into “two cons, one vision” (also “Share the Knowledge”).

The website once again preceded the actual artwork, and featured the first appearance of what would eventually become a Kiwicon Thing, Sheep. (note the windows xp style background. We were into ironic-XP before it was cool.)



With a design brief of “Classy two girls one cup”, we ended up with a sort of mermaid oroborous with a chalice of knooooowlledge (thats what’s in it, right?):



Other key aspects were the general crisp black and white, with plenty of lines (here, in the A2 poster, which of course ended up horribly banded with inconsistent black because of the small print run being not offset...). The double-colon :: thing was my attempt at a design in joke.



Kiwicon 3: “Kiwicon III: Army of Darkness”

Kiwicon 3 was the first Kiwicon of the Lisa era, and was somewhat limited design wise compared to the previous ones by being the con where Metl was learning to use InDesign. Lisa got involved relatively late, when Metl realised that this design shit was actually hard.

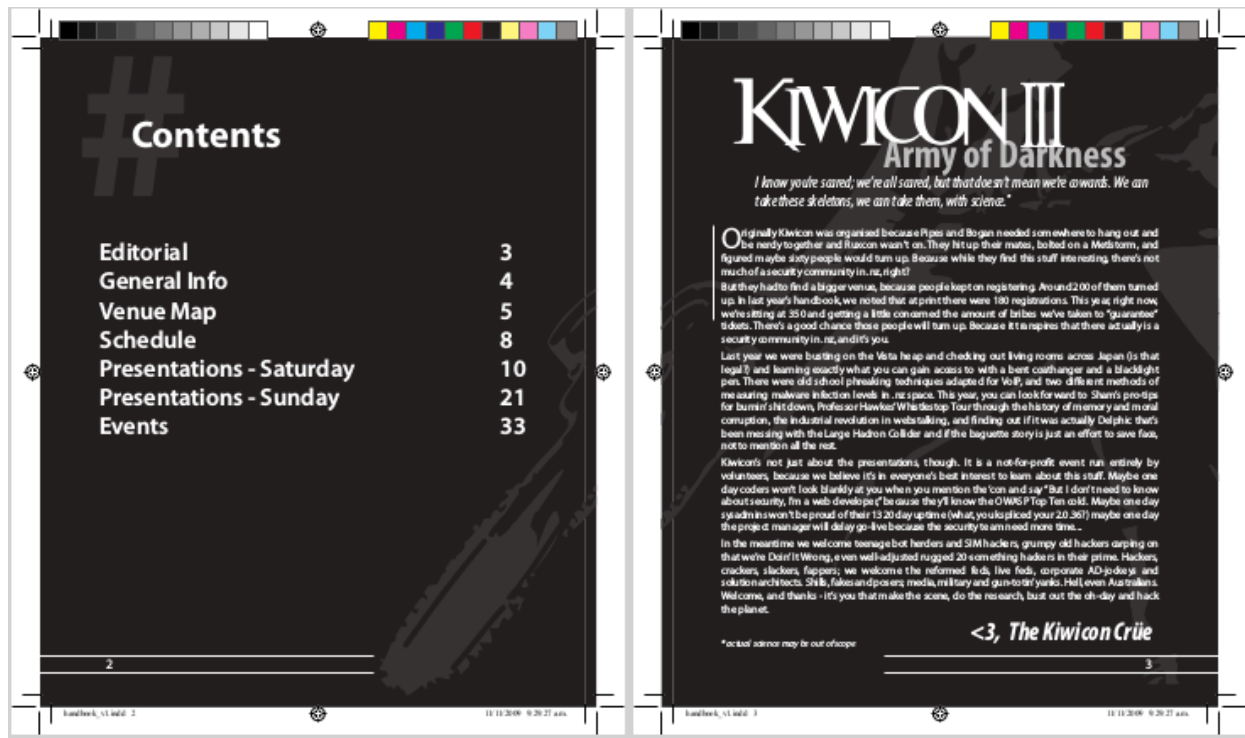
Given that, quoting the poet P. Anselmo, “Bad guys wear black”, Kiwicon coopted the cult movie Evil Dead III: Army of Darkness:



Given that Metl has no actual design ability, there were almost no variations of this. It was with or without Ash, or simply rearranged:



And reusing essentially the same black-with-white-lines-and-gray-background bits as the previous year's handbook:



The website at least matched the core art for the first time (and continuing the “Black with an accent colour schtick that the design challenged figure is hard to screw up):



Altho, the thing that has really endured from K3 was the “Hackers don’t give a shit” poster, which was a surprisingly last minute creation. It turned out to have aged.... Really sadly well. Goes to show that sometimes, good content trumps good design. Hell, even trumps awful kerning :) (I was struggling trying to get the things hackers don’t give a shit about short and snappy enough, and Lisa was all “naw, fuckit, ima just kern the shiiiiit out of it, it’ll be fiiiine”. Which it was.)

Hackers

don't give a shit:



KIWICON III

28TH & 29TH NOVEMBER 2009

New Zealand's Hacker con - Wellington

- ☐ About your project's scope
- ☐ It's managed by a third party
- ☐ It's a legacy system
- ☐ It's "too critical to patch"
- ☐ About your outage windows
- ☐ About your budget
- ☐ You've always done it that way
- ☐ About your Go-Live Date
- ☐ It's only a pilot/proof of concept
- ☐ About Non-Disclosure Agreements
- ☐ It wasn't a requirement in the contract
- ☐ It's an internal system
- ☐ It's really hard to change
- ☐ It's due for replacement
- ☐ You're not sure how to fix it
- ☐ It's handled in the Cloud
- ☐ About your Risk Register entry
- ☐ The vendor doesn't support that configuration
- ☐ It's an interim solution
- ☐ It's [insert standard here] compliant
- ☐ It's encrypted on disk
- ☐ The cost benefit doesn't stack up
- ☐ "Nobody else could figure that out"
- ☐ You can't explain the risk to "The Business"
- ☐ You've got other priorities
- ☐ About your faith in the competence of your internal users
- ☐ You don't have a business justification
- ☐ You can't show Return on Investment
- ☐ You contracted out that risk

Kiwicon 4: “The four e:Sheep-persons of the Cyber Infopocalypse”

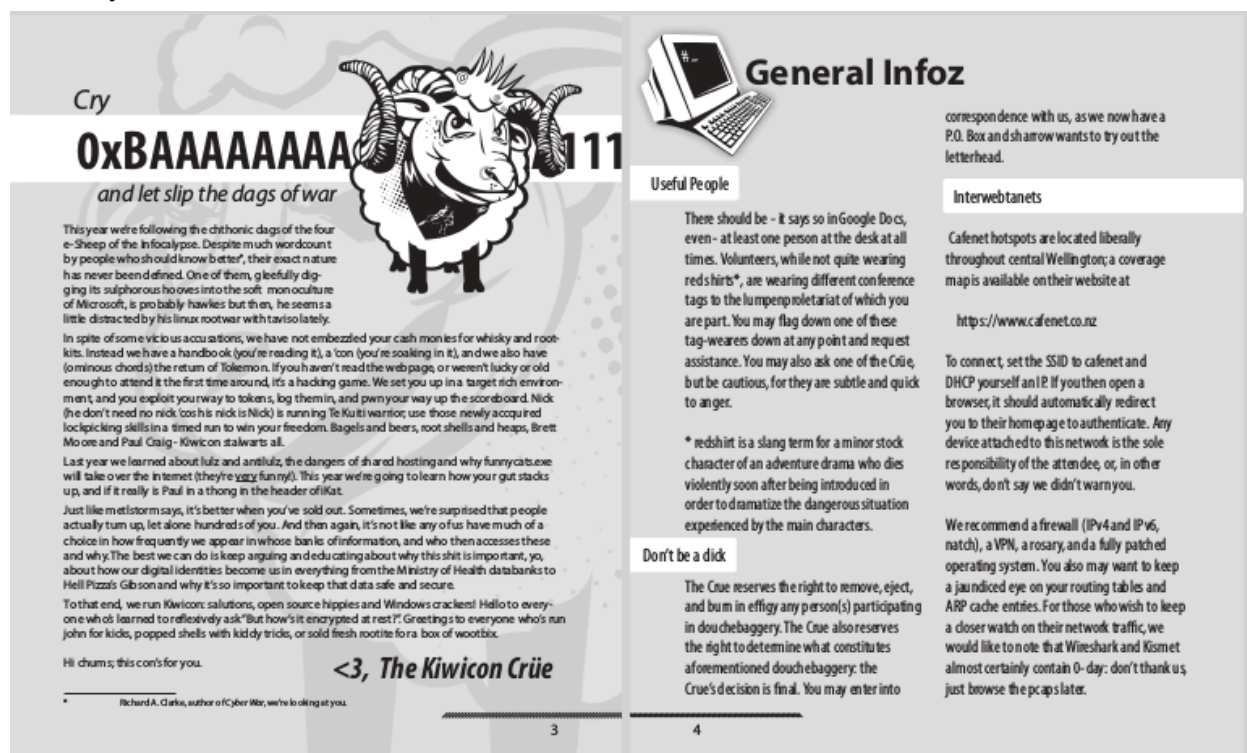
Kiwicon 4 was the first where we let Lisa run it from the beginning. Starting as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”, and fondly recalling the sheep from Kiwicon 2, we ended up with a gang of sheep; later dubbed “The four e:Sheep-Persons of the Cyber Infopocalypse”.



There was never any intent that the sheep mirrored the Crue at all, and people were free to adopt that which they felt empathy with (eg the hungover sheep). The design also introduced elements which would show up in later designs (celltowers, pterodactyls), and reuse of the previous art (the Kiwicon 3 bandanna). Don't ask how coke-bottle-glasses-nerd-sheep's glasses stay on. Pretend they're steampunk goggles before steampunk was in.



The handbook had more interest, being done by the actually competent Lisa instead of cargo culted by metl:



While the website stuck to the black+accent colour routine.



The tshirt fronts got:



While the hoodies got the horny sheep:

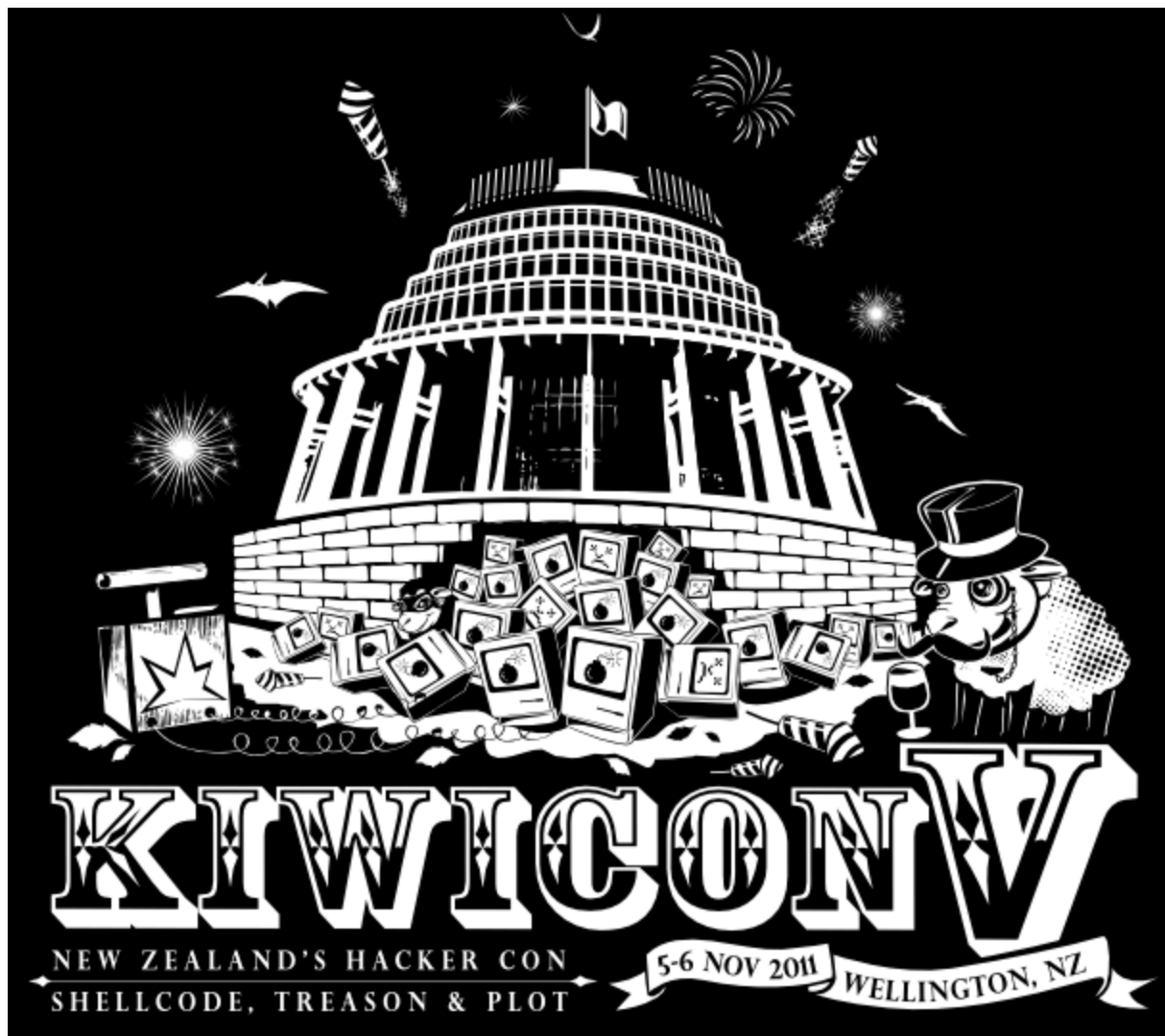


As the last of the Vic Uni venue, we'd become more confident, and things had started to get silly, although none of us knew quite how silly it was gonna get....

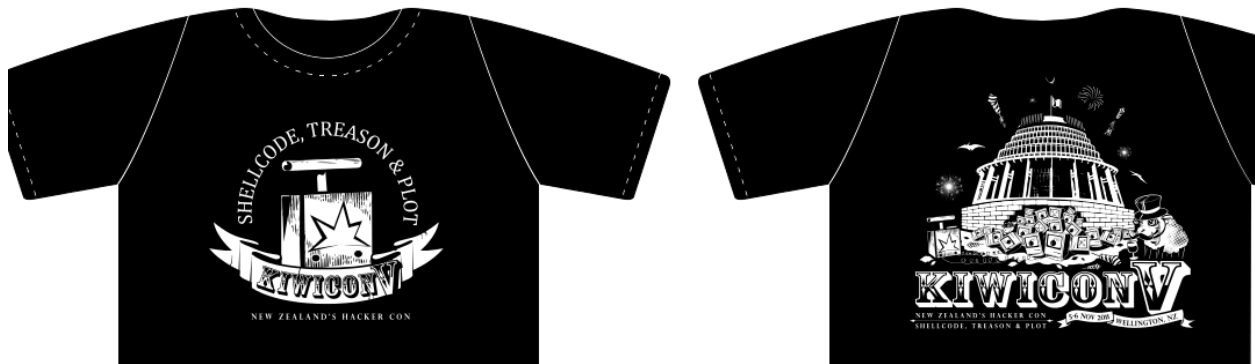


Kiwicon 5: “It Goes b00m”

Kiwicon 5 was held on Guy Fawkes, and was the move into a bigger venue (to the Opera House) and 600+ people. Using the guy fawkes rhyme reimagined as “Shellcode, Treason and Plot”, Kiwicon 5 was where Metl and Lisa had figured out how to work together, and the designs were getting more involved, less generic. With the brief of “a ringmaster sheep blowing up the beehive with a pile of crashed old Mac classics”, we ended up with well, exactly that:



The sheep added some contemporary elements - the hacker crew lulzsec was big in the news, and sheep got a glass of wine and a monocle as homage to the lulz of that time. The bomb-plunger also got used for the tshirt:



Other elements also got the vaudeville treatment:

07:00 Doors Open	14:15 Exploit automation with PMCMA - <i>Jonathan Brossard / Endrazine</i>
09:00 <i>Metlstorm</i> Welcomes the Combined Badasses	15:00 You wouldn't copy a car (and other more appropriate analogies) - <i>Marissa Jonpillai</i>
09:30 The Erlang SSH Story - <i>Geoff Cant / Archaeus</i>	15:30 BREAK: Afternoon Break
10:00 Hacking Hollywood - <i>vt</i>	16:00 Entomology – A Case Study
10:30 BREAK: Morning Break	

The badges too branched out: laser cut leather tickets, with personalisation from the more sophisticated registration system, while the high rolling got yet more ridiculous:



And the stage dressing increasingly matched the theme:



Heh.

Kiwicon 6: “The Con of the Beast”

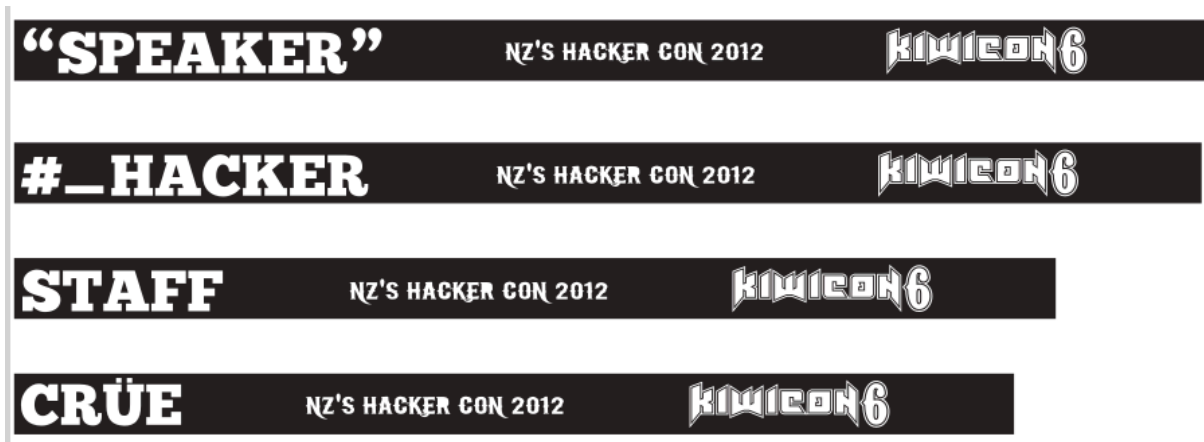
Kiwicon 666 was the metal con; make us a metal band tshirt logo, Lisa. And with the increased size, confidence and resourcing, the con had expanded. Live bands on stage at 9am, Kiwicon branded beer on tap, High roller blankets and chains oh my. Spewgoat (trivia: he's spewing out rootshells. Originally i think Lisa meant that he was eating rootshells, but it looked more like spew to the crue, and we kept saying MOAR SPEW! Until she got the idea and we ended up with the pile of chunder-#), as he is known was the star of the show, and when melded with the usual metal/occult tropes, pointy stabby fonts, and some tie ins from the previous cons and topical bits (anonymous masks, deflated GCSB radomes)



The expanded ambition included custom beer labels:



As well as printed lanyards:



To hang the various sizes of floppy disks we used for nametags (yes metl's is 8 inch floppy ha ha ha ha such sophisticated humour):



Also this happened:



... what can you say, right?

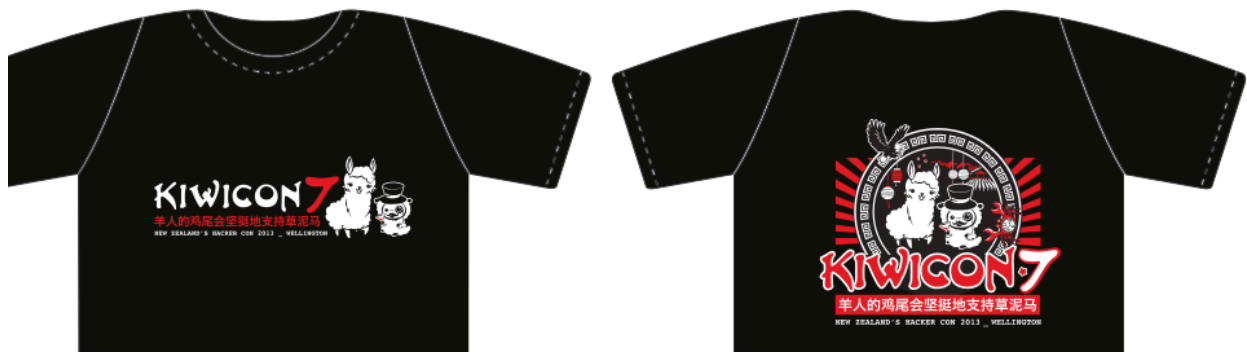
Kiwicon 7: “Cyberfriends”

Having done a metal themed con, which really wasn't Lisa's thing, we decided it was only fair to give her license to go FULL CUTESY. (We actually bought a “kawaiicon” domain for a joke and never actually used it...) Metl rather over-belaboured a chinese hacker theme, coming up with some elaborate, over complicated multilingual joke with loads of layers of symbolism and all sorts of finely crafted subtleties that were thoroughly unnecessary and no one got :)



But it was cute as shit.

And we let Lisa have more than one colour. So generous! On the merch too:



Then there were stickers and beer labels and all sorts of other crazy (custom die cuts! Why not!):





Of course, history showed us that substituting out the 5.5% ABV “pils’n’thrills” for something much stronger at the last minute... wasn’t the best choice ever. (Garage Project were all “OOH WE MADE A NEW BETTER THING YOU’LL LOVE IT!” and ... yeah ha ha we did? I think? Its hazy)

The website also surprised no one, sticking to the usual kiwicon styling (begat of metl being uninspired at design).



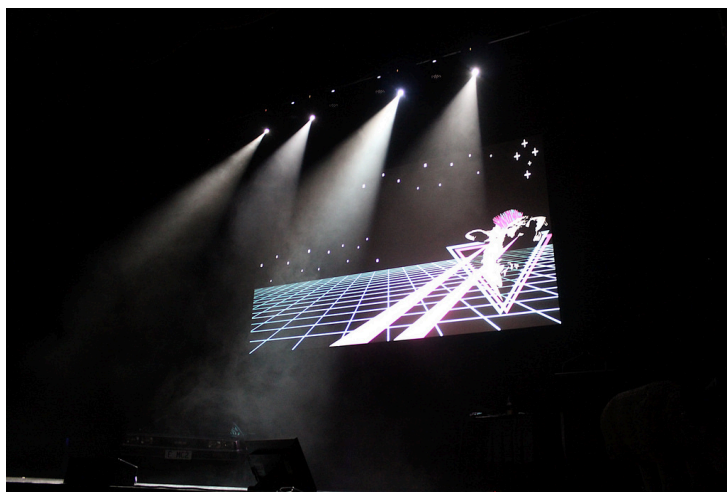
We did at least buy a lifesized stuffed alpaca made out of alpaca wool....



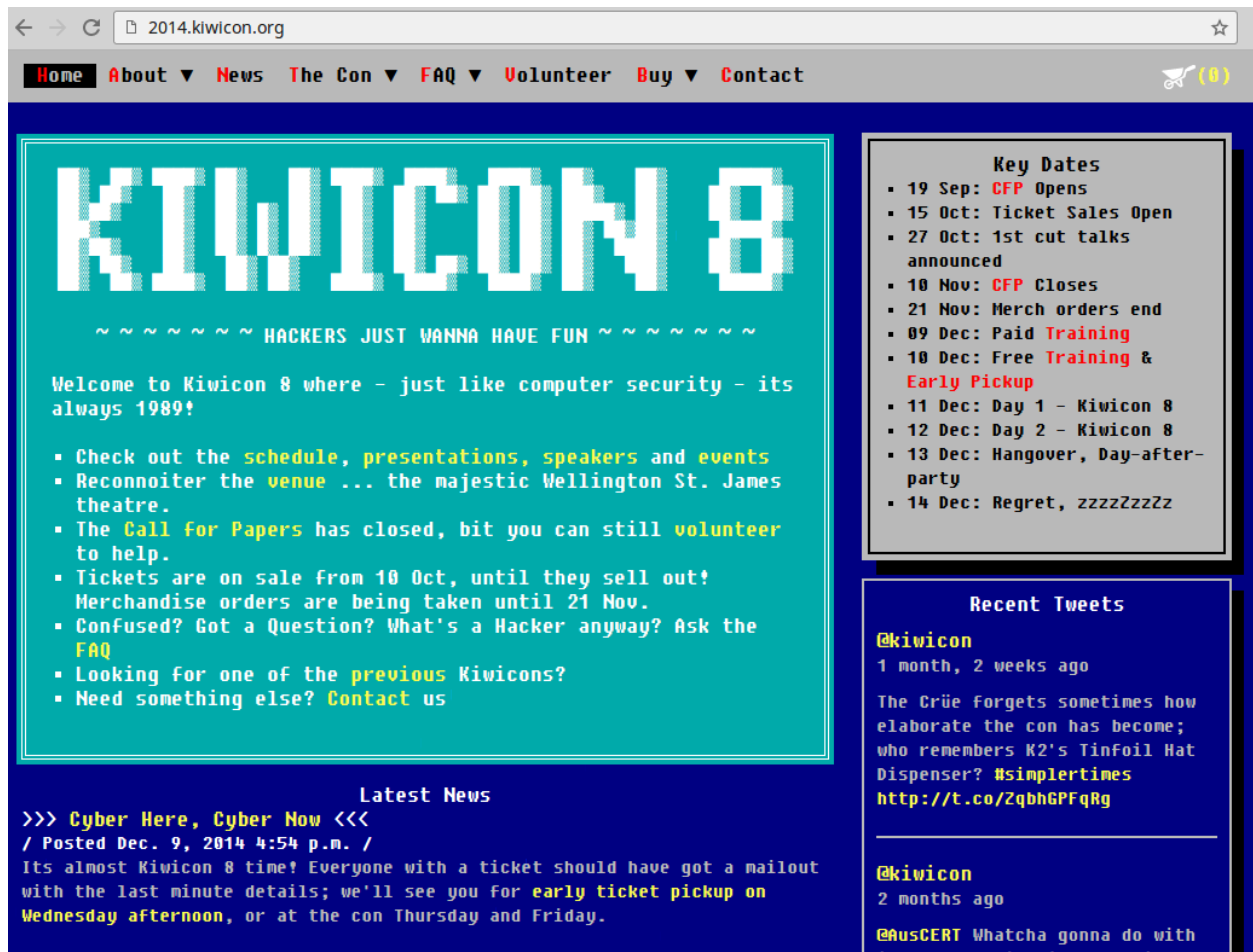
Kiwicon 8: “It’s always 1989”

After the over-wrought Kiwicon 7 theming, a retro-themed 1980s con was the antidote. Simple, easy, and from an art point of view, the most striking of the Kiwicons (where metl had least input “Cyndi lauper does kiwicon” and Lisa did better work as a result).

Keeping the sheep, and elements from previous cons (the sad mac, the southern cross, and a retro version of the same terminal from 4 and 5), and using the classic CGA palette of cyan and magenta, the design translated well into all the usual items.



The design however really didn't come together until the last minute (the handbooks arrived at 2pm on the afternoon before the conference), and the website had to be built before we had any art, which forced a creative solution ("Borland Turbo-Chic"):



While the high rollers.... They did well this year:



Kiwicon 9: “Cyberwar is Hell”

Again, Kiwicon 9 was suffering from having a lack of clear direction after 9 years, and everyone was busy, and the design ... it really didn't work. The plan for a military cyberwar themed conference seemed easy, but Lisa was busy, and Metl was busy, and everything got thrown together at the last minute, and was a bit haphazard.

The core design fell back on what was simple -the traditional Kiwicon sheep doing something theme appropriate, but without any of the cleverness of earlier years. The only thing that saved it (in metl's opinion) was the Born To Shell helmet, a last minute addition.



At least the beer named itself:



A circular treatment of the cyberwarsheep was used on the t-shirts and hoodies (Metl always imagines this as the “thats all folks” circular wipe from cartoons, after the punchline). There were also kakhi green mil-shirts (our first non black tshirts!) with a black version of the art, which have perhaps aged better than the black two color ones:



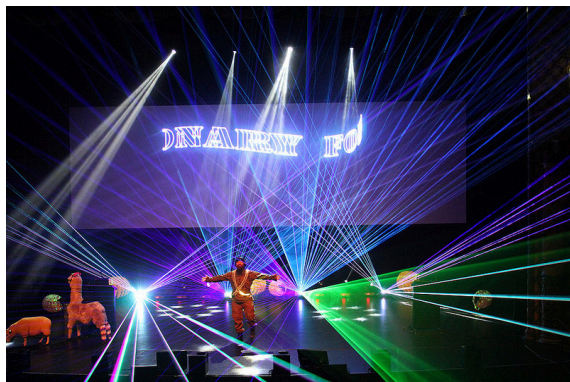
And the badges were obvious (altho, poor, poor Vex suffered greatly getting them to actually arrive in country, after the shipping went horribly wrong:



The website once again had to happen before the design existed, resulting in metl writing a lot of Javascript, and Jen doing magic, and it actually came out really well, with the original idea of “mil jet cockpit MFD chic” translating to:



In the end, we covered for what was a rushed design with ridiculousness, and no one noticed :), and some people said it was their favorite year, so who knows?



Conclusions

- The merchandise (tshirts, hoodies etc) really are the things that last, because people keep wearing them. The art on those is what people remember.

- Rushing it sucks for everyone.
- We do a _lot_ of things these days with signage and labels and stickers and merch stands and badges and posters and handbooks and lanyards and and and...
- 5/6/7/8 were really strong. 9, 4, 3 much less so.
- Kiwicon 1 was amazingly with its shit together given we had no idea what we were doing.
- I have no fucking idea how we actually pulled all this off over the years.