Enlighten Designs Sponsors AI Award, Backing Efforts to Close New Zealand's AI Gap

Enlighten Designs sponsors the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award at the 2026 Aotearoa AI Awards, backing the teams that have closed that gap.



Enlighten Designs at the 2025 Aotearoa AI Awards and AI Summit, AUT City Campus, Auckland. Enlighten is sponsoring the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award at the 2026 Aotearoa AI Awards on 18 November 2026.

HAMILTON, WAIKATO, NEW ZEALAND, September 10, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Enlighten Designs, a New Zealand AI software, web and data engineering firm founded in Hamilton in 1998, is sponsoring the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award at the 2026 Aotearoa AI Awards. The awards are run by AI Forum New Zealand in partnership with AUT. Finalists of the award were announced at the Aotearoa AI Summit on 8–9 September 2026 in Wellington, and the winner will be named at the awards ceremony on 18 November 2026 in Auckland.

How is AI being used in New Zealand right now?

Widely, and with returns organisations can measure. AI Forum New Zealand's AI in Action report (August 2025) found 91% of organisations reported efficiency improvements from AI, 77% reported lower operating costs, and 50% reported a positive financial impact.

Fewer can put a figure on it. In the same report, a third (35%) of organisations reporting a financial impact declined to place a value on it. Another 23% did the same for operational savings, which the report reads as a benefit still untapped or unmeasured.

Policy points the same way. New Zealand's Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (MBIE, July 2025) backs practical adoption over invention and cites industry research that generative AI alone could add $76 billion to the economy by 2038.

What's slowing AI adoption in New Zealand?

The step from pilot to production. McKinsey's State of AI survey (November 2025) found 88% of organisations worldwide use AI in at least one business function, but nearly two-thirds have not begun scaling it across the enterprise. Those are global figures, and MBIE notes most New Zealand organisations are still early in their own adoption.

Capability is the second barrier. KPMG New Zealand and the University of Melbourne (2025) found only 24% of New Zealanders have had any AI training, against 39% globally, and just 36% believe they have the skills to use AI appropriately.

What does the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award recognise?

AI that is already running, with results a judge can check. The category honours teams who have deployed AI in New Zealand and can demonstrate measurable outcomes, from productivity to accessibility, safety and sustainability.

“The teams that win this award aren’t the ones with the biggest budgets or the most advanced technology. They’re the ones who did the work, measured the result, and can tell the story,” says Damon Kelly, CEO of Enlighten Designs.

“Behind every entry in this category is a team that made AI work inside a real organisation, with real data, real systems and real constraints. These are the people we want to celebrate, and we're very grateful that Enlighten Designs is helping us to do that,” says Madeline Newman, Executive Director, AI Forum New Zealand.

Enlighten Designs sponsored the Outstanding AI Implementation award category at the 2025 Aotearoa AI Awards. Kiwa Digital took home the award for their AI-powered language and cultural platforms, delivering measurable value for organisations while uplifting Te Reo Māori and Pasifika languages across New Zealand and the Pacific.

Enlighten Designs builds and runs production AI systems for organisations in New Zealand and internationally. Enlighten built its own recruitment process around AI, screening and shortlisting on experience and expertise rather than first impressions.

“What once took 290 hours of manual work now takes 16. The point wasn’t to replace recruiters; it was to give them their time back to truly find the right person,” says Damon Kelly.

Award Finalists:

Finalists of the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award were announced at the Aotearoa AI Summit on 8–9 September 2026 in Wellington. The winner will be named at the awards ceremony on 18 November at AUT City Campus, Auckland.

Reinventing Engineering in Land Development by Tripp Andrews Surveyors

Scribo: Accelerated Online Writing Tool Implementation by EDconnect and Scribo

Structural Engineering Reimagined by Nodey

Tuhi AI by Awa Digital

Key Dates:

8–9 September 2026: Aotearoa AI Summit, Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre, Wellington. Finalists announced.

13–14 October 2026: Finalist interviews with the judging panel, held online.

18 November 2026: Aotearoa AI Awards ceremony, AUT City Campus, Auckland. Winner to be announced.

Registration to attend the Aotearoa AI Summit and the Aotearoa AI Awards is open at aotearoaai.nz.

Interview Availability

Damon Kelly, CEO of Enlighten Designs, is available for interview on AI implementation in New Zealand, the adoption-to-scale gap, and the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award. Please contact Drishti Ratna at Enlighten Designs.

About Enlighten Designs:

Enlighten Designs is a New Zealand AI software, web and data engineering firm founded in Hamilton in 1998. It builds AI, data, custom software, modern workplace and web solutions for organisations in New Zealand and overseas, across sectors including energy, finance, education and the public sector. Enlighten is a Microsoft Partner with Azure specialisations and Microsoft Fabric Featured Partner status, and a member of AI Forum New Zealand.

About the Aotearoa AI Awards:

The Aotearoa AI Awards are run by AI Forum New Zealand / Te Kāhui Atamai Iahiko o Aotearoa in partnership with AUT. They recognise individuals, teams and organisations working in artificial intelligence in Aotearoa New Zealand across seven categories, including the Best Implementation of AI in Aotearoa Award.

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