



Bright future: Europe's online innovators shine at 2022 .eu Web Awards

By Alastair Gill

The ninth edition of EURid's annual celebration of the best .eu websites brought together talented individuals and entrepreneurs from across Europe as part of the new .eu Day.

Young internet entrepreneurs from Greece, Croatia, Spain, Hungary and the Netherlands were among the winners at the ninth annual .eu Web Awards, held in Mechelen, Belgium on 17 November.

Representatives of innovative online companies with the .eu domain from all over Europe gathered in the historic Flemish town to celebrate their achievements at the event, which took the form of a gala dinner. It was a joyous occasion for the winners, many of whom could not hide their delight and surprise as they accepted their awards amid a festive atmosphere at Mechelen's waterfront Van Der Valk hotel.

Fresh format

The .eu Web Awards, which recognises the best websites with the .eu top-level domain, have been held annually since 2014. This year, however, the ceremony was incorporated into the .eu Day, a new event organised by EURid to celebrate the achievements of Europe's online change-makers and entrepreneurs and equip them for further success. The award ceremony was preceded by the .eu Academy Masterclasses, a series of expert-led workshops aimed at supporting young online companies.

This year there were 821 nominations from 23 countries for the awards. These were then narrowed down by public online voting to 18 finalists, three in each of six categories. A five-member expert jury then chose a winner in each category based on various criteria, including content, structure, design, and accessibility. A special commendation was also

awarded to recognise the importance of youth in the EU. The winners received an online budget of €5,000, to be spent with the help of a EURid-appointed marketing agency, and a .eu icon made of Bohemian glass. All the finalists also received a special expert consultation package to help them further improve the quality of their websites and online identity.

The 2022 .eu Web Awards kicked off with a cocktail and canapé reception, before the nominees, jury members and guests were invited into the auditorium for the main event. As they took their seats, the lights dimmed and the Belgian all-girl choir **Scala** filtered into the room in diaphanous gowns, chanting a bewitching interpretation of "The Hanging Tree" from The Hunger Games.

The host for this year's award was Ray Cokes, the presenter of 1990s MTV Europe hit series MTV's Most Wanted. Cokes' irreverent wit and easy-going stage manner made him an instant hit with the guests, but he also fulfilled his duties as master of ceremonies with professionalism and panache. After a brief introduction from Peter Janssen, EURid's new General Manager, the ceremony got under way.



Ray Cokes
presenter of MTV's Most Wanted



Leaders Award: kaila.eu

First up was **The Leaders**, a category for established national online businesses. The award went to **kaila.eu**, a platform that offers smart digital services to promote open innovation in Europe. Kaila.eu has been developed by Zabala Innovation, a Spanish firm offering consultancy services on innovation strategy and financing.

"Kaila is a platform that aims to promote innovation in Europe, so we were very clear from the beginning

that the .eu domain was the best for us," said Zabala's communications and marketing officer Michelle Unzué, enthusiastically receiving the award with her colleagues.

Later in the evening, Unzué said that the award would encourage Zabala to continue developing the platform. *"We're really excited and really grateful for the award. Of course, it's been really hard work, so this is a validation and proof that our work has been recognised, so it's great for us,"* she said.



"Kaila is a platform that aims to promote innovation in Europe, so we were very clear from the beginning that the .eu domain was the best for us."

- Michelle Unzué, communications and marketing officer at Zabala



Laurels Award: flamingo-project.eu

The third prize of the night went to **flamingo-project.eu**, a Horizon 2020 EU-funded project aimed at replacing the use of steel in the automotive industry by developing lightweight aluminium components for electric vehicles. The **Laurels award** is given to an institution or programme that promotes pan-European projects, and Flamingo Project fitted the bill perfectly, bringing Greece a second award.

“So many Greek winners!” exclaimed Project Manager Ilias Gkotsis, receiving the award. He underlined that the initiative’s support for green efficiency made it especially relevant in today’s Europe. *“It shows how cross-EU collaboration can have a good impact.”*

Rising Stars Award: mvpmedia.eu

The .eu Web Awards also recognise developing start-ups and companies that are still finding their place on the market. The chairwoman of EURid’s board of directors, Sandra Hoferichter, presented the **Rising Star award** to **mvpmedia.eu**, a six-month-old Greek agency offering a full range of digital marketing and brand promotion services.

“This is a great opportunity for us to start our companies the right way”, said Ioannis Stamoulis, Digital Marketing Specialist at MVP Media. *“It’s a great experience, and the ideal start for my business. It’s a surprise [to get an award so soon after starting] but we worked for this very much”,* said Stamoulis, who said the next step for MVP Media is to open central offices in Athens and grow the team.



“This is a great opportunity for us to start our companies the right way”

Ioannis Stamoulis
Digital Marketing Specialist at MVP Media



“They’ve really worked a lot on creating all kinds of content and demonstration actions and tools, and all kinds of research papers, so we really had to make a website that can present this in a coherent way.”

Jon Jonoski
Communication Officer at ICLEI Europe

Better World Award: cityloops.eu

In the **Better World** category, the jury chose to give the award to the European branch of the global sustainable development network ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) for its work on **cityloops.eu**. City Loops is an H2020 project focusing on seven European cities that are attempting to switch to a circular economy: Porto, Seville, Apeldoorn in the Netherlands, the Danish towns of Høje-Taastrup and Roskilde, Mikkeli in Finland and Bodø in Norway. City Loops aims to pilot demonstration actions aimed at finding sustainable solutions for biowaste and construction and demolition waste.

“This is a really great honour for City Loops”, said Jon Jonoski, Communication Officer at ICLEI Europe, adding that it proved that *“even bins and compost and waste can be really interesting.”* The award is very much a win for the entire consortium, he explained later. *“They’ve really worked a lot on creating all kinds of content and demonstration actions and tools, and all kinds of research papers, so we really had to make a website that can present this in a coherent way.”*

House of .eu Award: likaclub.eu

A young Croatian entrepreneur’s longstanding devotion to promoting his native region earned him the **House of .eu award**. Ante Fumić, whose website **likaclub.eu** has been showcasing the Lika region for eight years now, stepped up to receive the award in this category, which rewards a website, or blog representing companies or individuals in the news, media or entertainment industry.

“I’m totally excited, I didn’t expect this in my dreams,” said Fumić after the ceremony. *“Our idea is to tell good stories from the Lika region and to call people back to the area.”*





Best of IDNs Award

The **Best of IDNs prize** is awarded to an organisation, company or institution that uses an .eu or .eu extension. The Internet Governance Forum Greece (**φορουμδιακυβερνησηδιαδικτυου-ελ.ευ**), a non-profit initiative promoting responsible digital policies, beat off competition from two Bulgarian finalists to notch yet another win for the Greeks at this year's .eu Web Awards.

"I'm feeling so happy, my stomach was trembling", said Georgia Sousourada from IGF Greece after the ceremony. "We care for this project and we love this project, and we're so happy that we made a great job and outcome out of it." Her colleague Charis Kiritsis said the award would empower them to reach even more people, "and to continue also the great work, not only the website, but in every part of the Internet Governance Forum Greece."

"We care for this project and we love this project, and we're so happy that we made a great job and outcome out of it."

Georgia Sousourada
IGF Greece



Commendation for the Youth Award

The final prize was a new award introduced to recognise the achievements of young European internet entrepreneurs and individuals, and was open to finalists aged 18-30 in all categories. The Commendation for the **Youth Award** was presented by João Pedro Martins from EURid's Youth Committee.

The winner was **noon.eu**, an international e-commerce collaboration selling Swedish-made ecological beauty and healthcare products. Founder and CEO Akos Solymosi finally launched his dream project two years ago after sitting on the idea for eight years.

"I didn't expect this – I didn't even remember we are in this category so it's a little bit of a surprise!" he said, visibly excited.

After the ceremony, Andres Barrios, Noon's country manager for Spain, spoke a little more about what the award meant to them. *"Knowing that we are doing something good for the world inspires us. So we're going to keep working, keep developing, we're going to keep working with our teams, keep looking forward", he said.*



Time to celebrate

After all the winners had joined Ray Cokes on stage for a group photo, the lights dimmed, and Scala took the stage again for the final act, conducted by Stijn Kolacny with his brother Steven on the piano. The choir gave a series of mesmerising performances, including versions of Coldplay's "Trouble" and "Viva la Vida", as well as hits by Queen and KT Tunstall.

With the ceremony over, the guests finally got the chance to let their hair down, and Belgian **DJ Eric Yamazawa** was happy to oblige, playing a high-energy set of pop and dance tracks that kept the party going until late into the night. Many of the guests drank, danced and made memories in EURid's special photo booth until well past midnight, celebrating another year of success for Europe's digital entrepreneurs.