PRESS RELEASE

Digital Economy Award 2026: Naomi MacKenzie named Pioneer of the Year

Aid that reaches people without a bank account. Factories that are built before the first excavator arrives. AI agents that find and fix software bugs on their own. And a founder who uses artificial intelligence to make food waste measurable. Tonight, the Digital Economy Award presented ten awards for pioneering achievements like these. In front of around 600 guests from business, politics, public administration and research, 29 finalists from six categories took to the stage.

Key facts at a glance:

- Pioneer of the Year 2026 is Naomi MacKenzie, co-founder of Kitro. The laudatory speech was given by Bertrand Piccard.
- Swiss President Guy Parmelin sees Switzerland as a world leader in invention, but with «room for improvement» when it comes to growing its companies.
- Further awards went to the SDC and AIDONIC, Roche, LogicStar AI, the ERNE Gruppe, Föllmi ICT AG, CSS and two NextGen Heroes.
- The Cyber Command of the Swiss Army received a special award for a training programme that is so far unique in Europe.

Pioneer of the Year
With Kitro, Naomi MacKenzie has developed AI-based image analysis that enables restaurants and catering businesses to measure their food waste and reduce it in a targeted way. What ends up in the bin becomes visible, and what is visible can be changed. The jury and the audience, each accounting for half of the vote, chose her as «Pioneer of the Year». She prevailed against Imanol Schlag (ETH Zurich), Amin Amini (Loxo), Andreas Göldi (b2venture) and Yves Zischek (Digital Realty). The laudatory speech was given by Bertrand Piccard, who embodies the pioneering spirit like few others.

World champions in invention, with room for improvement
The fact that the President of the Swiss Confederation opened the anniversary edition underlines the importance of digital innovation for Switzerland as a business location. «We are world champions in invention. When it comes to growing big, we still have room for improvement», said Guy Parmelin in his speech, referring to the challenge of scaling innovative Swiss projects within the domestic market.

This is exactly where the Digital Economy Award comes in: it gives a stage to those who dare to take the step from idea to success. «Switzerland sows at the highest level: in education, research and vocational training. But we can only reap the harvest if people turn this knowledge into companies, products and jobs. Pioneers are this

bridge», says Andy Fitze, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Digital Economy Award AG.

More than a third of people are still held back from founding a company by fear of failure, he noted. «Courage is contagious. Those who see role models are more likely to take the step themselves. Tonight, 29 such role models stood on the stage. Our task is to make sure their stories have an impact far beyond this evening.»

Impact you can trace
No internet, no bank account, no mobile phone: for many people in crisis regions, this is everyday reality. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Zug-based company AIDONIC show how aid can still get through: AIDONIC's platform also works offline and, thanks to blockchain, makes aid funds fully traceable. For this, they won the «Public Sector & NPO» category.

In the «Business» category, Roche won over the jury with a digital twin that goes far beyond a 3D model: it allows production facilities and their processes to be simulated realistically before construction even begins. Scenarios can be tested virtually and bottlenecks identified early, reducing time, costs and risks.

The jury named LogicStar AI the «Next Global Hot Thing». Founded in 2024 with roots at ETH Zurich, the start-up develops AI agents that independently detect, reproduce and fix software bugs. The more code is written by AI in the future, the more important this capability becomes. The award was presented by Carla Bünger and Thomas Taroni of Swiss tech unicorn Phoeniqs.

Training builds the future: special award for the Swiss Army
In the «ICT Training» category, the jury honoured three companies that show particular commitment to training the next generation of skilled professionals: the ERNE Gruppe (1 to 20 ICT employees), Föllmi ICT AG (21 to 100) and CSS Kranken-Versicherung AG (more than 100), which also took the overall win.

A special award went to the Cyber Command of the Swiss Army, which trains militia members to become specialists in its cyber course. «We are honouring a training programme that is so far unique in Europe and that counters the acute shortage of highly qualified professionals in Switzerland», says Marcus Dauck, head of the jury. The graduates are in extremely high demand and pass their professional examinations with top marks, he added. With their expertise, they also strengthen the private sector and help Switzerland respond better to cyber threats.

90 seconds for the big idea
The «NextGen Hero» category set hearts racing in the hall: Agam Jamwal (REWAVE), Kevin Willeit (findmee), Sarah Mühlemann (be[a]ware) and Alina Ritzinger (VidMa) each had 90 seconds to win over the audience. Sarah Mühlemann and Agam Jamwal were chosen.

With be[a]ware, Sarah Mühlemann develops training sessions in which participants take on the role of hackers and experience first-hand how cyberattacks work. With REWAVE, Agam Jamwal is building a Swiss platform that gives independent musicians worldwide reach without having to give up control over their music. swissICT President Claude Honegger presented the trophies.

Winners 2026 (canton of origin in brackets)
Pioneer of the Year: Naomi MacKenzie, co-founder of Kitro (VD/ZH)
NextGen Hero: Agam Jamwal (ZH) and Sarah Mühlemann (BE)
Next Global Hot Thing: LogicStar AI (ZH)
Business: F. Hoffmann-La Roche AG (BS)
Public Sector & NPO: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC (BE) and AIDONIC AG (ZG)
ICT Training, 1 to 20 ICT employees: ERNE Gruppe (AG)
ICT Training, 21 to 100 ICT employees: Föllmi ICT AG (SG)
ICT Training, more than 100 ICT employees: CSS Kranken-Versicherung AG (LU)
ICT Training, overall winner: CSS Kranken-Versicherung AG (LU)
ICT Training, special award: Swiss Army, Cyber Command (BE)

Photos of the evening: https://www.swisstransfer.com/dl/01a1f5e4-9a30-7342-8226-d94b8d67348e

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About the Digital Economy Award
The Digital Economy Award is the stage for the pioneers and role models of digital Switzerland. It honours people and organisations who take responsibility through technological excellence, entrepreneurial courage and social impact. The focus is on innovations with substance, demonstrable impact and credible stories. The award makes these achievements visible and encourages others to take the step themselves. In 2026, it was presented for the 20th time. It is organised by Digital Economy Award AG; swissICT is the main shareholder.

About swissICT
swissICT is the leading Swiss ICT association, representing 2,200 members along the entire digital value chain, including providers, user organisations and ICT professionals. The association strengthens the visibility of the Swiss ICT sector, advocates for favourable framework conditions and promotes knowledge exchange, skills development and collaboration through specialist groups, conferences and platforms such as the Digital Economy Award.