Press release

196+ forum Munich: Launch of the Hospitality UPGRADE Award 2026 – Spotlight on the Best Start-ups

Applications open until August 4

Munich, July 3, 2026 – The search is on for the most innovative ideas in the hospitality industry. In cooperation with Hospitality Pioneers, the 196+ forum Munich is announcing the tenth edition of the Hospitality UPGRADE Award. The award will be presented on October 7 as part of the renowned industry conference at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof.

First round, semi-final, final

This year, the competition once again offers expanded opportunities for participants, all of whom are invited to take part in the virtual first round, the Speed Dating event, on August 18 and 19. During this stage, 10 start-ups will qualify for the semi-final, taking place on September 9, 2026, in Berlin. These 10 young companies will then present themselves in person to the UPGRADE expert committee on September 9. The expert committee is made up of professionals from various fields related to the hotel industry. During the networking dinner that follows at “the CORD” on the Berlin EUREF Campus, the 5 finalists will be announced.

Over the past years, this platform has developed into a dynamic forum for exchange with experts and decision-makers from the hospitality, real estate, tech, and investment sectors, focusing on innovation within the hospitality industry. The involvement of start-ups creates a direct and curated exchange with mentors from the network. The five selected finalists will pitch live on October 7 on the main stage of the 196+ forum Munich at Hotel Bayerischer Hof Munich, competing for the win in front of a jury.

Apply now

The competition is looking for European start-ups offering smart, sustainable, and market-ready solutions across the entire hotel value chain – from development and

construction to hotel and accommodation operations. The application deadline is August 4. Applications can be submitted at: https://hospitalitypioneers.de/programm/verleihung-des-hospitality-upgrade-award-2026/.

Christian Fiedler, Managing Director of Hospitality Pioneers and spokesperson for both the curators and expert jury, says: “Every year, we see the incredible innovative power within the hospitality industry. With the Hospitality UPGRADE Award, our goal is not only to recognize the best ideas, but also to build bridges between innovators, investors, operators, and owners. Because the future of the industry is shaped where great ideas meet the right partners.”

Finalists will receive:

- Invitation to the exclusive expert committee networking dinner on September 9, 2026, at “the CORD” at the EUREF Campus
- Invitation to the PKF hospitality group’s Expo Real Dinner at Seehaus Munich on October 6, 2026
- Full-day ticket to the 196+ forum Munich including an exhibition space and participation in the gala evening on October 7, 2026
- Visibility across all communication channels of the organizers

The winner will receive:

- The "Hospitality UPGRADE Award"
- Free participation in the 196+ forum Munich 2027 including gala and exhibition space
- One-year free membership in the AK Hotel Real Estate working group (Arbeitskreis Hotelimmobilien), including access to the networking dinner and all four annual meetings

More information about 196+ forum Munich:
196+ forum Munich is the European conference for hospitality and real estate experts and since 2002 the annual networking fixture for professional exchange in the field of hospitality real estate. As a specialist conference, 196+ forum Munich is a highly qualified communication platform with a versatile stage program, various networking formats for the hospitality real estate industry as well as an established start-up pitch for the "Hospitality UPGRADE Award". The highlight is

the "Hotel Property Award" ceremony. In 2026, 196+ forum Munich will take place on October 7, followed by "walk & talk" tours on October 8 to special hospitality-related locations in Munich's city center. Further information at https://196plus.com/

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