

INDIE|TOP 40 AGENCY NEWS CLASSIC

2026 Entry Kit (Effective Jan. 29, 2026)

Thank you for entering Top 40: Classic 2026.

We're excited to celebrate the best creative work from independent agencies worldwide.

This kit includes:

- Key dates and pricing
- Eligibility requirements
- Category descriptions
- Fillable entry worksheets (5 entries)

Key Dates

Call for Entries Opens	Monday, February 2, 2026
Early Deadline	Friday, April 3, 2026 at 11:59 PM PT
Main Deadline	Friday, April 24, 2026 at 11:59 PM PT
Final Deadline	Friday, May 1, 2026 at 11:59 PM PT
Top 40 Finalists Revealed	Monday, May 18, 2026
Top 40 Week Livestreams	June 1–5, 2026

Pricing

Deadline	Standard	Member (25% off)
Early (through April 3)	\$159	\$119.25
Main (April 4–24)	\$179	\$134.25
Final (April 25 – May 1)	\$199	\$149.25

IAN Members: Email top40@indieagency.news for your discount code.

Eligibility

Who Can Enter

Submissions are accepted ONLY from independent agencies with no percentage owned by holding companies, consultancies, or publicly traded companies where advertising or marketing is the main business. Client-side creative teams and holding company agencies are not eligible.

What's Eligible

All entries must have been first published, posted, or aired between January 1, 2025 and April 1, 2026. This includes campaigns, projects, and executions across all disciplines — advertising, design, digital, experiential, social, branded content, and beyond.

Entry Limits

There is no limit to the number of entries per agency. The same work may be entered in multiple categories if it demonstrates excellence across those disciplines.

Additional Requirements

- A written English translation must accompany any non-English language submission.
- Indie Agency News may request proof of initial publication, posting, or airdate.
- Work previously entered in Top 40: Classic that is materially unchanged is not eligible.
- All entries are subject to eligibility review. Entries that don't meet requirements are not eligible for a refund.

How It Works

Work is judged across 10 categories. The top 10 in each category is listed, then the top 4 entries in each category advance to the Top 40. A final round of voting determines the overall ranking from 40 to 1. All finalists are revealed during Top 40 Week — five days of livestream countdowns.

Questions?

Contact us at top40@indieagency.news

Pre-Paid Entry Packs

Awards budgets can get a little hinky. Pre-paid entries give you predictability and savings. Use them for any IAN show, and they never expire.

5-Pack: \$125/entry

10-Pack: \$100/entry

Learn more: indieagency.news/pre-pay-your-awards-entries

Categories

1. Idea

The breakthrough creative concept

The concept at the core—the 'what if' that made everything else possible. Not the execution. Not the strategy that got you there. The creative idea itself. Was it fresh? Unexpected? Did it make people stop and pay attention?

Enter work featuring:

- A breakthrough creative concept that drove the entire effort
- A single, powerful insight that unlocked everything
- An idea that reframed the problem in a way no one had before
- A creative platform with legs beyond a single execution

2. Strategy

The insight that made it inevitable

The thinking that set everything up. This is about the strategic insight—the research, the positioning, the audience understanding—that made the creative work inevitable.

Enter work featuring:

- A strategic insight that changed how the brand showed up
- Research or data that unlocked a new direction
- Audience understanding that drove meaningful creative decisions
- A repositioning or go-to-market approach that delivered results

3. Craft

Execution excellence

Flawless execution. This category honors the skill, precision, and artistry that elevated the work from good to unforgettable. Whether it's visual design, copywriting, cinematography, animation, sound, or production.

Enter work featuring:

- Technical excellence in any creative discipline
- Meticulous attention to detail that elevated the final product
- Mastery of visual, auditory, or interactive elements
- Production quality that stands out in a crowded landscape

4. Media

Smart placement, not just big spend

This category celebrates work where the media strategy was a creative act in itself—innovative channel use, unexpected placements, or data-driven targeting that made the work hit harder.

Enter work featuring:

- Innovative or unexpected media placements
- Channel strategies that amplified the creative idea
- Data-driven targeting that delivered measurable results
- Media choices that were integral to the concept, not an afterthought

5. Social + Creator

Built for the feed and conversation

Work built for the feed—and beyond. This category honors creative that was born on social platforms, designed for sharing, and built to create conversation.

Enter work featuring:

- Campaigns created specifically for social platforms
- Community engagement that built real connection
- Influencer or creator partnerships that felt authentic
- Work that sparked conversation, sharing, or participation

Categories (continued)

6. Experience Design + Activation

Pop-ups to brand ragers

Work that showed up in the real world—and redefined how people interact with a brand. Pop-ups, installations, live events, packaging innovations, product design, web presence revamps, and retail environments.

Enter work featuring:

- Experiential activations that engaged audiences in physical spaces
- Pop-ups, installations, or live events with creative ambition
- Strategic evolutions of packaging, product design, or web presence
- Brand experiences that redefined how consumers interact with the brand

7. Partnerships / Branded Content

The art of fusion

Strategically aligned, creatively compelling collaborations between a brand and a partner that produced original content. Work built on shared values and complementary audiences.

Enter work featuring:

- Strategic partnerships that created high-impact connections
- Original content produced through collaboration
- Work built on shared values and complementary audiences
- Content that served the audience first—without feeling like an ad

8. Force for Good

Work that made a positive impact

Creative that addressed social, environmental, or cultural challenges. PSAs, sustainability initiatives, DEI efforts, and purpose-driven campaigns where doing good and doing great creative weren't mutually exclusive.

Enter work featuring:

- Cause-driven campaigns that delivered real impact
- Work advancing sustainability, equity, inclusion, or social change
- PSAs that cut through and drove action
- Brand work authentically connected to a larger purpose

9. Little Budget + Big Impact

Creativity that embraces constraint

This category celebrates work where the idea did the heavy lifting—earning attention through creativity, not paid placement. Show us how you turned limitations into your greatest advantage.

Enter work featuring:

- Campaigns with limited resources that delivered outsized results
- Work that earned attention through PR, organic sharing, or cultural relevance
- Scrappy, resourceful executions that punched above their weight
- Ideas so good they didn't need to buy their way into culture

10. Wild Card

Don't fit anywhere else? Here's your white canvas.

Creative brilliance doesn't always fit in a box. If your work defies categorization—or represents something truly unique—this is your category. Tell us what you made and why it matters.

Enter work featuring:

- Work that genuinely doesn't fit any other category
- Creative that invented its own lane
- Projects that defy traditional advertising definitions
- Anything brilliant that needs its own stage

Entrant Information

Complete this section once. It applies to all your entries.

Agency

The name of your agency or company.

Primary Contact Name

Primary Contact Email

We'll use this email for finalist notifications and event updates.

Phone (optional)

Ready to Enter?

Submit your entries at: top40classic2026.iceberg.app

Questions? Contact top40@indieagency.news

Follow us on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/indie-agency-news

Entry 1

Use this worksheet to prepare your entry before submitting online.

Client

The organization that hired you to create the work.

Category

Which category are you entering? (See pages 3–4)

Project / Campaign Title

Tell Us the Story of This Work

One field. Your story. Tell it the way it deserves to be told. (500 words max)

Consider: The craft. The strategy. The results. What was surprising. Why this work matters.

Supporting Materials

List the videos, images, URLs, and/or PDFs you'll include.

Entry 2

Use this worksheet to prepare your entry before submitting online.

Client

The organization that hired you to create the work.

Category

Which category are you entering? (See pages 3–4)

Project / Campaign Title

Tell Us the Story of This Work

One field. Your story. Tell it the way it deserves to be told. (500 words max)

Consider: The craft. The strategy. The results. What was surprising. Why this work matters.

Supporting Materials

List the videos, images, URLs, and/or PDFs you'll include.

Entry 3

Use this worksheet to prepare your entry before submitting online.

Client

The organization that hired you to create the work.

Category

Which category are you entering? (See pages 3–4)

Project / Campaign Title

Tell Us the Story of This Work

One field. Your story. Tell it the way it deserves to be told. (500 words max)

Consider: The craft. The strategy. The results. What was surprising. Why this work matters.

Supporting Materials

List the videos, images, URLs, and/or PDFs you'll include.

Entry 4

Use this worksheet to prepare your entry before submitting online.

Client

The organization that hired you to create the work.

Category

Which category are you entering? (See pages 3–4)

Project / Campaign Title

Tell Us the Story of This Work

One field. Your story. Tell it the way it deserves to be told. (500 words max)

Consider: The craft. The strategy. The results. What was surprising. Why this work matters.

Supporting Materials

List the videos, images, URLs, and/or PDFs you'll include.

Entry 5

Use this worksheet to prepare your entry before submitting online.

Client

The organization that hired you to create the work.

Category

Which category are you entering? (See pages 3–4)

Project / Campaign Title

Tell Us the Story of This Work

One field. Your story. Tell it the way it deserves to be told. (500 words max)

Consider: The craft. The strategy. The results. What was surprising. Why this work matters.

Supporting Materials

List the videos, images, URLs, and/or PDFs you'll include.