



# STAGING THE AIBs 2021

For the second year running, our annual competition for journalism and factual productions was staged online. Here's how we put them together in the virtual world

**A**s we prepared to launch the [AIBs](#) at the beginning of 2021, it was clear to the Secretariat that it was simply too risky to embark on a traditional competition and associated celebration of success. Doubts over travel, meetings, quarantine, vaccinations and more meant that the likelihood of staging our traditional celebration was slim. For the second year running, we took the difficult decision to have the entire contest online from start to finish.

As we put together our entry book, we researched how many people were working in their offices, either full-time or part-time. The situation varied from country to country and from company to company, with no clear pattern. In

spite of the uncertainties around how many people would be able to pick up physical mail at their office, we decided to go ahead with the print edition of the [entry book](#) and mailed 3,000+ copies to our awards mailing list in 100+ countries.

That delivered additional value to our sponsor of two categories, Radio Taiwan International, who generously renewed their support of the *AIBs* helping us to be able to run the competition at the highest level. An RTI advert was included in the entry book and all email notices about the awards included acknowledgement of RTI's support.

As the book went out – packed for the second year in the garage of an AIB staff member by a young neighbour – we embarked on our digital marketing campaign, promoting the *AIBs* to as many broadcasters, production companies and individual

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The *AIBs* remain significant in the global media calendar  
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journalists and editors as possible. The combination of the physical and digital campaigns quickly produced results with entries arriving within a few hours of the competition going live – and from new entrants as well as established participants.

## THE RIGHT DECISION

The quantity of entries flowing in confirmed that the *AIBs* remain significant in the international calendar and that our celebration of success – even when moved online – is well-regarded. At the AIB Secretariat, we recognise that the awards are an important showcase for journalists and producers the world over. That's why we strive to ensure as wide a range of content as possible reaches the shortlist, irrespective of language or budget. 2021 was no exception, with work from 80 companies in 35 countries



totalling over 350 hours submitted to the competition. It was noticeable that the volume of work was slightly down on previous years – unsurprising, given the challenges in developing and producing new content in the period from July 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. Nonetheless, we received an extraordinary range of work from every continent, telling stories, uncovering facts, and keeping audiences informed. That’s what is so gratifying for the small team at the AIB Secretariat that administers the awards – we see the most extraordinary stories told in such a wide variety of ways.

### THE JUDGING

The AIB Secretariat invited regular and potential new judges from every continent over the months leading up to the competition closing date. More than 50 judges accepted our invitation and in September and October they evaluated the work that reached the shortlist.

At the same time, the AIB Secretariat started work on perhaps the biggest job that’s involved in

putting an online event together which includes potential winners stretching from California eastwards to Europe, onto the Middle East, across Asia and over to Australia and New Zealand: gathering reactions from every single short-listed entrant.

In our live events, we make sure that our presenter is armed with questions about the production that’s won in a category. For our studio-based events, we do the same – except that it means crafting 200+ questions for each and every shortlisted entry, and sending them off for the producers to record videos. It’s a mammoth task both in compiling the questions and then managing all the video clips that come back to the Secretariat.

By asking every single shortlisted entrant to answer questions about their work, we maintain that element of secrecy and surprise – nobody will know until the two awards programmes go to air whether or not they have won. And it also means that wherever in the world a winner is located, they get their moment in the spotlight in the awards

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**To maintain surprise, we asked every shortlisted entrant to record videos with responses to specific questions**  
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▲ Giles Duley being interviewed by Simon Spanswick in Hastings  
 ▼ Our 2021 judges appeared on the video wall during the programmes

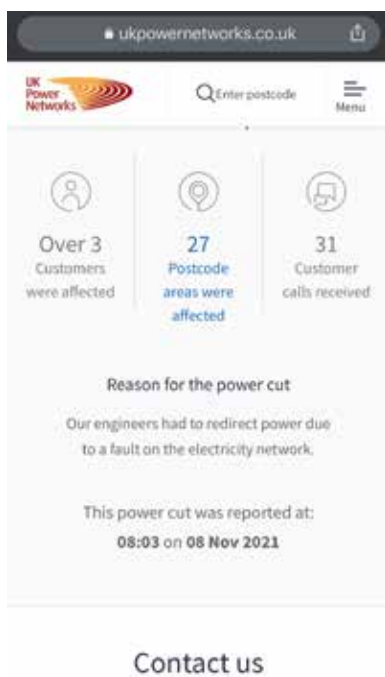
programme, without having to get up at 4 o’clock in the morning or stay awake until the small hours!

Then it’s scripting the show, putting together the clip reels that highlight all the shortlisted entries, constructing the video wall graphics (the AIB team had to learn how to prepare these, from formats to pixel ratios - a new skill that we now have in-house in the Secretariat), and coming up with ideas to make the awards programmes relevant and interesting.

This year, we decided that we would open and close the shows in the town of Hastings on the south coast of England. Hastings is around 15 miles (24km) from the AIB Secretariat. The town also has other claims to fame: it was here that John Logie Baird gave the world’s first public demonstration of television in 1924, having constructed the first ever television receiver in his house in the town the previous year. And Hastings is also where documentary photographer, writer and chef Giles Duley lives. Followers of the AIBs will remember that back in







STAGE	SLUG	FORMAT	STATUS	APPROVED	PRODUCER	READ	SOT	TOTAL	CUM. TIME	BACK
	DONT EDIT RUNDOWN UNTIL 9/11					0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00:00	
1	TITLES AIBS 2021 DONT DELETE.	SOT				0:00	3:30	3:30	0:00:00	
02	KAMAHL WELCOME	PRES				1:30	0:00	1:30	0:03:30	
03	JUDGES THANKS	PRES/WALLVZ				0:25	0:00	0:25	0:05:00	
04	CONTEXT VT	PRES/PKG				0:37	4:03	4:40	0:05:25	
06	CAT 1 - POLAND BUS	PRES/LIVE*				0:46	0:00	0:46	0:10:05	
001	CAT 1 Q2	PRES/LIVE*				0:06	0:00	0:06	0:10:51	
12	CAT 2 VT CONT NEWS	W/PKG				0:00	4:37	4:37	0:10:57	
13	CAT 2 WIN - Q1 + Q2	PRES/LIVE*				0:58	0:00	0:58	0:15:34	
16	CAT 3VT 9NGL NEWS TV	W/PKG				0:00	5:12	5:12	0:16:32	
17	CAT 3 WIN - US	PRES/LIVE*				0:44	0:00	0:44	0:21:44	
21	CAT 4 NEWS REP RADIO	W/PKG				0:00	0:00	0:00	0:22:28	
22	CAT 4 WIN - QS	PRES/LIVE*				0:47	0:00	0:47	0:25:04	
25	CAT 5 NEWS AGENCY	W/PKG				0:00	2:30	2:30	0:25:51	
26	CAT 5 WIN - QS	PRES/LIVE*				0:35	0:00	0:35	0:28:21	
28	CAT 6 SHORT DOC	W/PKG				0:00	0:00	0:00	0:28:56	
29	CAT 6 WIN - QS	PRES/LIVE*				0:33	0:00	0:33	0:34:02	
31	CAT 6 Q3	PRES/LIVE*				0:03	0:00	0:03	0:34:35	
33	CAT 7 HUMAN INTEREST TV	W/PKG				0:00	0:00	0:00	0:34:38	
34	CAT 7 WIN AND QS	PRES/LIVE*				0:40	0:00	0:40	0:41:07	
37	CAT 8 HUMAN INT RADIO MD/ALU	W/PKG				0:00	0:00	0:00	0:41:47	
38	CAT 8 WIN AND Q1	PRES/LIVE*				0:00	0:03	0:03	0:41:47	
39	CAT 8 WIN AND Q2	PRES/LIVE*				0:52	0:00	0:52	0:47:10	
40	CAT 8 Q3	PRES/LIVE*				0:07	0:00	0:07	0:48:43	
41	CAT 8 Q4	PRES/LIVE*				0:01	0:01	0:01	0:48:43	
42	CAT 8 Q5	PRES/LIVE*				0:30	0:11	0:41	0:48:43	
43	CAT 8 WIN AND Q3	PRES/LIVE*				0:45	0:03	0:48	0:54:09	
44	CAT 9 Q2	PRES/LIVE*				0:36	0:00	0:36	0:54:42	
47	CAT 9 DOMESTIC AFFAIRS	W/PKG				0:00	0:00	0:00	0:54:42	
48	CAT 9 WIN AND QS	PRES/LIVE*				0:00	0:15	0:15	0:54:52	
49	CAT 9 Q3	PRES/LIVE*				0:06	0:01	0:06	1:01:07	
50	CAT 9 Q4	PRES/LIVE*				0:00	0:00	0:00	1:01:07	

2013 Giles was our guest for our “In conversation” segment at the awards in London. We had been wanting to catch up with Giles for some time and find out what’s happened in his career since he won two AIB awards in 2013.

We met him in his apartment on the seafront on our filming day in Hastings and talked about his work chronicling the effects of conflict on civilians over the past eight years, and found out about his passion for food that he shares via his mouth-watering Instagram account at [https://www.instagram.com/one\\_armed\\_chef/](https://www.instagram.com/one_armed_chef/). You can watch the interview with Giles at theaibs.tv, and read an article in the AIBS Winners and Finalists book [here](#).

### YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT UP

A couple of days after the Hastings filming, we hooked up from the UK to Studio 14 at Al Jazeera in Doha. The network had kindly agreed to make available studio facilities for the awards programmes, as well as putting forward principal presenter Kamahl Santamaria as host.

An immense amount of work had been done by the production team led by Ben Bawden to ensure that recording was as straightforward as possible, including assembling the programme in iNEWS and backtiming all the winner responses to ensure that Kamahl could ask questions to tape with no pauses or crashes, making the whole programme appear and feel live.

▲ Left: unexpected power outage as the recording of the AIBs began in Doha  
 Right: the running order in iNEWS for programme one. The AIBs are a complex production

▶ Editor Ben German tackling the first of the two AIBs 2021 programmes at the AIB Secretariat



What no one had expected was that five minutes into recording, there would be a major power outage in the area around the AIB headquarters. At 0803GMT we were plunged into darkness as the electricity supply failed. Alarms on our UPS devices sounded relentlessly. The heating went off (it was 3.4 degrees centigrade outside) and the AIB team sat in darkness as the office temperature fell to around 12 degrees.

It really was one of those “you couldn’t make it up” moments. We managed to reconnect to Doha using two iPhones – one providing studio output, the other talkback to the gallery and presenter. Somehow, as fingers numbed with the cold, we managed to keep the show recording on track (mostly because of the great team in Doha!). At 0853, the power returned

and so for the second show we could get back to more normal communications as well as making coffee to warm the AIB team up.

The recording of the second episode went without a hitch, and by 1300GMT we had both editions safely recorded. Then our freelance editor Ben German (who had also edited the category clip reels) took over and polished the programmes for release the following Friday and Monday.

### IT ALL WORKED

At 1500GMT on Friday 12 November, we released [programme one](#), again as live to prevent people skipping forward. Throughout the show we received positive feedback from viewers across the world and the comments kept coming that evening and over the weekend. On Monday 15 November, [part two](#)

“The AIBs are a complex production”

was released – again as live – at 1500GMT, with more favourable comments coming in from our global audience.

We made extensive use of social media platforms to announce the winners and highly commended entrants immediately they were announced on the programmes (another benefit of releasing them “as live” to maintain secrecy and suspense). Broadcasters, production companies, judges and others retweeted and sent messages of congratulation to the winners. A global conversation had started and continued for days after the programmes were released.

### WHAT ABOUT 2022?

Now we must look forward to next year and the 18th *AIBs*. We really hope that we can restart our live awards event in London, bringing together the international journalism and factual production community. Yet as we have discovered in the last days of November, uncertainty remains about travel as new strains of COVID-19 are discovered and restrictions on travel are put in place by governments around the world.

We have pencilled in 11 November as awards night, at our planned new venue of Church House Westminster, right in the heart of London. We hope that it will be possible to make in-person presentations of our awards then. We will monitor the situation closely and keep *AIB* Members and the wider media industry updated on our plans.

Meanwhile, we will open the *AIBs* 2022 at the beginning of April, continuing our tradition of celebrating the hugely important work of journalists and programme makers across the world. Here’s to our 18th awards! ■

## Why the *AIBs* matter

The *AIBs* were established in 2005 at the suggestion of *AIB* Members to celebrate the work of programme makers across the membership. It was quickly decided that the competition should be open to the entire media industry and the *AIBs* rapidly gained traction with journalists, producers, directors, executives, and commissioners across the world.

Sharing work via the *AIBs* extends the professional audience for journalism and productions, and helps to inspire programme makers worldwide to tackle new subjects in innovative ways. The competition is about both sharing and celebrating success.

Today, the *AIBs* are recognised as one of the preeminent awards in the global media calendar and attract the highest level of productions from every continent.

We ensure that none of the judges meets their own work, or that of colleagues, in order to make the *AIBs* as fair and transparent as they can be.

And the *AIBs* are not run on a for-profit basis – the income pays for the global competition to be run effectively and to as high a standard as possible, while covering costs. Any surplus goes into the *AIB* for the benefit of our Members around the world.

## How you can help

Staging the *AIBs* is complex, time consuming and expensive. **Sponsorship** income helps to make sure that each year we can put on a show – whether virtual or in-person – that does justice to the work that is submitted by journalists and programme makers across the world. There are many opportunities available to raise brand awareness through the awards, and to reach the influential audience that attends, judges, or observes the *AIBs*.

Please **spread the word** about the awards and the opportunity for brands to associate themselves with the success that the *AIBs* represent.

It may be that a **supplier to your organisation** will be interested in getting involved to demonstrate their commitment to international journalism and factual programming.

Read the sponsorship book online [here](#).



- ▲ The *AIBs* generate global coverage, demonstrating the impact of the competition



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