

Four reasons why young people don't bother listening to the oil and gas industry

The claims made in this report are based on the cumulative knowledge and experiences of the individuals whom were a part of «The New Oil», where over the course of a year, they talked to and listened to representatives from the oil and gas industry, from the renewable energy industry, entrepreneurs, and thousands of students close to their age group. This unique opportunity given to them by the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association, has provided the ability to see both sides of the story and provide insight into exactly why the millennium generation's opinions, hope and dreams for the future differs so vastly from the projections given by the oil and gas industry. The report consists of four claims, where a general problem will be presented along with a possible solution. This translation is merely a summarized version and it will therefore not go deeply into each claim.

Over the course of a year The New Oil has: travelled across Norway twice, spoken to close to 11,000 people, 7,000 of whom were students and pupils, arranged workshops at close to 40 universities and colleges and visited over 90 companies. Through social media they have reached over 600,000 users on facebook, their posts have been viewed over 1 million times and thousands of users have actively engaged with their content.

Project initiated by the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association

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The four claims will be presented in the following order

The oil and gas industry see themselves as a part of the solution and do not admit to being a part of the problem.

The oil and gas industry does not present a future the millennials wants to be a part of

The oil and gas industry knows too much to see this generation's point of view

The oil and gas industry's one-size-fits-all communication just doesn't work

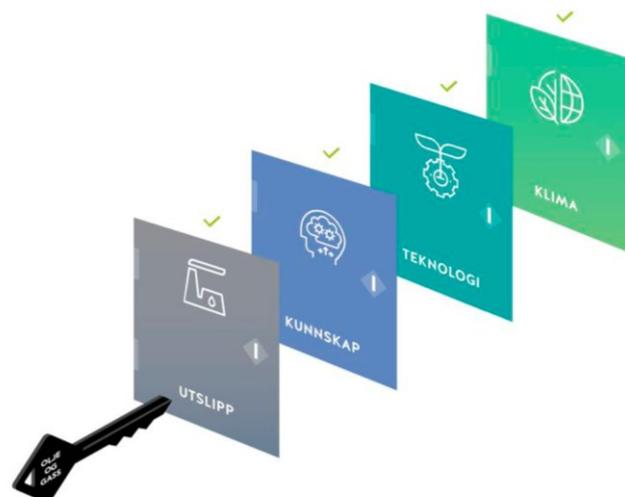
1. The oil and gas industry see themselves as a part of the solution and do not admit to being a part of the problem.

The generation that is now finishing their degrees and entering their professional life is called the millennial generation. Every generation has a characteristic and, possibly, a defining cause. The millennials fights for a better world, by fighting the climate change. For this particular generation, the interest in the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals has been limited to goal number 13 – climate action.

The oil and gas industry in Norway have been sending out a message saying that through this industry lies the path to a better world. While this might actually be the case regarding certain aspects, such as the financials and available work force, the younger generations views the oil and gas industry as the root of the problem. This generation's knowledge of the oil and gas industry, can be summed up to - fossils fuels are bad. This is a simplistic view, but if the root of the problems are fossil fuels, then the solution is simple - The world should stop using fossils fuels. However, this neglects how entrenched the use of fossils fuels are in everyone's daily lives.

This leads to the question, how should the oil and gas industry send out their message in a way that the millennials actually believe and might even support?

The solution can be summed up in a figure illustrating four doors. The oil industry has tried to present itself as having the key to opening the door to a better climate. From the perspective of the younger generation, the industry only has the key leading to climate problems. For the industry to develop credibility with the younger generation, it first need to address the elephant in the room.



“Yes, we are part of rising greenhouse gas emissions, but through those emissions, we gain knowledge and technology that will ultimately lead to a greener and better world.”

Diverge from the path using excuses such as “the rising need for energy”, or “the lesser of two evils”. They will only be perceived as justifications to continue production as before. Stand for what the industry does, but also showcase how the industry is moving towards greener pastures.

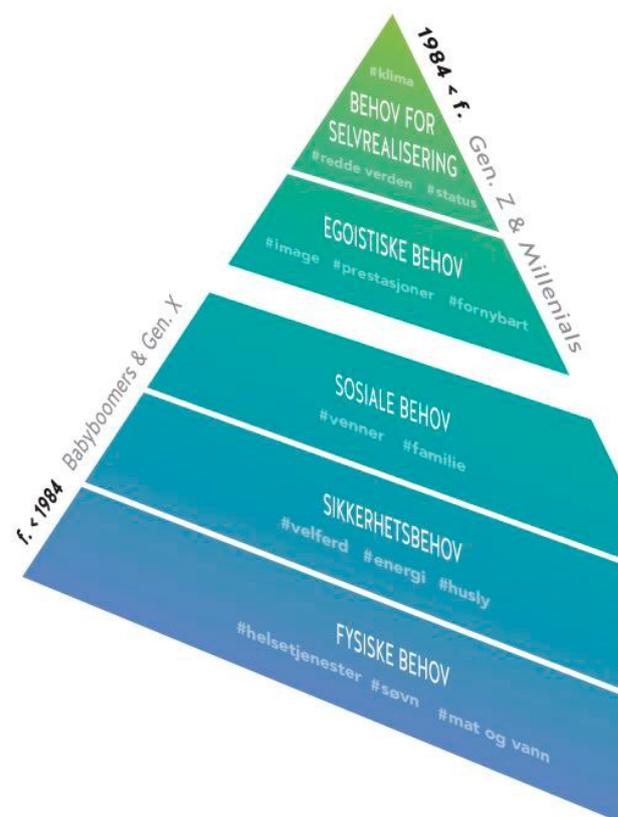
2. The oil and gas industry does not present a future the millennials wants to be a part of

This claim is based on the difference in values between the baby boomer generation (born 1945-1960) and the millennium generation (born 1985-1995). The difference in values can be explained by Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The baby boomers are characterized as having family life as an important priority, and a deeply rooted belief that hard work will pay off. Being born shortly after the war, there was also a period of time where there was a certain lack of essentials. This has led to a focus on the bottom three levels of the pyramid, the need for a sense of security. The millennials have grown up with these needs covered as a guarantee, and in some ways, even to excess. Which has led to a greater need for self-realization. The millennials therefore focus on the top two levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

This difference between the generations is the reason why the oil and gas industry’s line of reasoning does not appeal to the younger generations. The current communication strategy appeals to the bottom three layers, the need the previous generations have for security of home, future and having their physiological needs met. For the millennium generation, the security net that is the welfare state has always been there, and so surely it always will. How can the industry bridge that gap?

What can the industry do to paint a picture of the future that the millennium generation wants to be a part of?

The suggested solution consists of two parts. The message being sent out needs to be adapted to the younger generation’s need for self-realization. Highlight how the oil and gas industry, or energy industry if you will, moves forward to build the same future that the younger generations wants. Most importantly, approach the younger generation not as a wise old professor intent on lecturing, but as a slightly more experienced senior needing a fresh set of eyes on a difficult problem.



3. The oil and gas industry knows too much to see this generation’s point of view

The difference in knowledge, not necessarily the amount, but the area of knowledge and the way of living is what results in a difference between the two generations.

In the time some people spend watching the evening news, millennials have scrolled through pages upon pages of their chosen social media. They have caught up on the latest gossip in their extended circle of friends, deposited likes, written comments, and read the leading news on their areas of interest. The information given through social media is highly edited to fit each individual's likes and desires. The undesirable is left unread and this includes messages sent out by undesired parties.

Another difference between the generations in how they view the world – it can in short be called a battle between optimism and realism. The previous generations know the struggle it has been reaching this level of living standards. They know that the process of developing new technology and building up new industries takes years, perhaps even several decades. The millennials have experienced the massive leaps technology has taken in the last ten years alone, and therefore have a more optimistic view of the future and what can be achieved.

The presented solution is to skew the perspective.

It is important that the oil and gas industry does not stop being fact-oriented; it is their strength and the foundation they can build upon. Depending on the desired target audience, highlight some arguments more heavily than others. Bluntly put – pick your battles.

Among the Norwegian students mass, a large group are familiar with the fact that a massive windmill farm is being built outside of Scotland. But, they do not know it is called Hywind, and they do not know it is Statoil building it. This is merely an example of something that could have been more strongly advertised to appeal to the millennials.

4. The oil and gas industry's one-size-fits-all communication just doesn't work

The experiences behind this claim is mostly based on the communication this industry has had in Norway, therefore the problem presented and the solution might not be applicable in other countries. The general message behind this claim is, on the other hand, applicable to other countries as well as other industries. The message being; if the target audience is wide, as in that it goes across several age-groups, occupational backgrounds, etc. the message needs to be adapted to the different target audiences.

The possible solutions to the problem presented here is meant as helpful tips to keep in mind when developing communication strategies.

Keep a constant presence.

Whether the oil price is skyrocketing or stumbling along, it is important that the industry is present. This goes for universities, debates; both private and public, and any public appearances. It is in absence that rumors and doubt flourishes.

Celebrate diversity.

This concerns the products and goals the companies have, and its employees. Showcase the different projects the companies have, what they are trying to accomplish and how it will make a difference. When meeting different crowds, let them know that the company is more than its 50-year-old CEO. The millennials might be more open to change their mind if they can engage in a discussion with someone closer to their own age with whom they can relate. Give the younger employees the opportunity to answer why they chose that job and what they hope to achieve through it.

Experiences from discussions with students, “The New Oil” was concerned with the hostility displayed towards the oil and gas industry paired with the indifference to its contributions to Norway – the welfare state. It was obvious that the solution could not be a two-hour lecture. The group then developed a card game based on the Norwegian government budget, where the students were given the opportunity to run the government. Through this game the students learned the intricacies of financially running a country, through discussions they learned how it is never as easy as it seems and how there are so many things to consider. By playing this game the students did not need to be told or lectured on anything, they arrived at the conclusions themselves.

The Tunnel Model

The essence of communication targeting millennials can be summed up in one picture. It has been named The Tunnel Model. The tunnel represents today’s society and it illustrates what the younger generation cares about, how the oil and gas industry is perceived and what the oil and gas industry should focus on when trying to communicate with the younger generations of today.

What lies at the end of the tunnel is what the younger generations want, a world supplied by green energy. When this will happen is unknown, but what the millennials do know is that they want to be the people digging towards it.

At the far left, you will see how the younger generations views the oil and gas industry. Arrogant polluters who only care about money. This is a hard image to repel, but the road to trust lies in admitting the fact that this industry is a major emitter of greenhouse gases.

Everybody knows that when digging a tunnel, one needs support beams. The technology, capital and knowledge the oil and gas industry brings to the society is represented by those support beams. They are what gives the society the opportunity to dig towards a better future. Without these support beams, the society collapses.

Illustrate that the industry as a whole is no longer just oil and gas, that the industry as a whole is up there, right alongside everyone, digging toward a better, greener future.

