Meet Windō, revolutionising how purpose-driven Gen Z find employers

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Oli Coles, CEO & cofounder and Ken Janssens, Head of Social Impact & cofounder of Windō, about sustainability, Gen Z and building an audience.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Windō?

[Oli] Back in 2021, I launched the MVP of a charity fundraising and activity tracker application, and started to notice that the app was being mentioned in Company Reports as a way of noting charitable activity to employees, stakeholders and investors.

This led me to, for the first time in any real detail, look at how companies report on the good they're doing for the planet and people. It quickly became clear that reports were lengthy, targeted at investors, and widely varied. I then started to research who was looking at these reports and who they mattered to the most, and an audience that really stood out was Gen Z, students and graduates. Not only were they being underserved by these reports, but they were the most interested in businesses' corporate and social responsibility performance. The founding team then looked for the platform that took all of this data and presented it in a standardised and user-friendly way. But that platform didn't exist - so we decided to build it.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

[Ken] Our mission is to become the most trusted, up-to-date and exhaustive resource for corporate sustainability data. Our secure data hub holds sustainability, DEI and employee well-being data for every company in the FTSE250, Fortune100, CAC40 and DAX40, and this data is fed into several services within our ecosystem.

We are a transparent, accessible and interactive resource for reviewing organisations' sustainability plans and progress. Our primary goal is to help purpose-driven Gen Z find employers who align with their values and to date we have organically attracted 35k+ unique users, with 150k+ profile visits. Users can track the progress, plans and achievements of companies from 2017 through to today, across thousands of comparable data points to help inform their job applications and job offer acceptance decisions, all presented in a digestible and engaging format.

[Oli] A separate service allows DEI and sustainability professionals to request benchmarking reports from _Windō_, comparing them to organisations of their choosing. Here we will identify opportunities for the organisations to consider including in upcoming reports and can identify areas in which they can improve communicating their sustainability story to young talent. Companies can additionally use Windō to learn which impact metrics they should be tracking and reporting on based on the practices of organisations leading the way in sustainability and what governments and companies' target audiences want them to report on.

We additionally license DEI data to one of the world's largest financial institutions to feed into their investment algorithms, and work closely with non-profit DEI partners like Out & Equal to co-produce reports to spotlight

leaders in transparency and inspire other organisations to follow their lead. We also work with 730+ outgoing and incoming University Society Presidents from 50 UK Universities, helping us to collect data and produce research outlining Young Talent's expectations around CSR reporting. Our Gen Z and corporate insights have been viewed millions of times, and we now speak at universities across Europe, and host our own events for Young Talent in partnership with leading corporations such as Bloomberg.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

[Oli] In January 2022 Windō was a seed of an idea - and then things moved very quickly. We spent the first year working with students from across the country to populate the platform with data for the FTSE100 and the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers. We were quickly listed on the careers web pages for Oxford and Cambridge Universities, as well as UCL, LSE, Exeter University and Oxford Brookes (where I am an 'Entrepreneur in Residence') amongst others.

[Ken] In the first half of 2023, I was travelling Europe in an RV with my husband, having left my Chief Data Officer position at J.P Morgan after 25 years working there. Unable to sit still, I started to analyse the Sustainability and DEI reports of every company in the FTSE100 and Fortune100, inputting the key data into spreadsheets in order to write my own reports and insights. I stumbled across Windō and was blown away. Oli and I quickly teamed up as co-founders, and my data collection enabled us to expand our data and platform to what it is today.

Tell us about the working culture at Windō.

[Oli] We are a fully remote team at present - so much so that Ken is living the digital nomad lifestyle over the summer period, working early

mornings from beaches and mountain ranges as he travels Europe with his husband and their two dogs. Outside of that we are creative, fast-moving and respectful, working closely alongside our advisory board of 20 university and Gen Z leaders.

Why is verifiable commitment to sustainability/DEI progress a non-negotiable for recruiting young talent?

[Ken] Gen Z will make up *30% of the global workforce* before 2030, and what they look for in a job *differs drastically* from previous generations. Above all, it's clear that Gen Z values impact, with *91%* more likely to work for companies that prioritise their sustainability (versus *64%* of millennials).

One thing that we noticed in building Windō is that if Gen-Z can't find the information clearly online, they will still do their homework, often looking for companies' controversies and mistakes on the internet during the application process. We believe that purpose - and transparent commitment to this purpose - is now an absolute necessity for this generation.

How are you funded?

[Oli] We were able to get started with funding from friends and family. We now operate on early revenue from corporate partnerships.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

[Ken] One of our biggest challenges at Windō has been combatting the perception that we simply display what companies put in their reports.

This feedback has been a valuable driver for us to go beyond just surface-level information and truly add depth to our platform.

To address this challenge, we have developed several features that provide a more comprehensive and transparent view of a company's commitment to DEI. For instance, we not only track and display a company's achievements and metrics but also highlight their mistakes and challenges. This includes pulling in public statements they've made on critical issues like gender equality, racial justice, and LGBTQ+ rights, ensuring that our users get a balanced and realistic view of each company's efforts. Moreover, we only feature reputable DEI awards and recognitions to ensure credibility. This allows users to see a much more comprehensive track record than a single report could offer.

Lastly, we've introduced a comparison tool that lets users compare any data point on the fly with a competitor, offering valuable insights into how companies stack up against each other in various DEI metrics. By continuously innovating and expanding our platform's capabilities, we've been able to overcome the initial perception challenge and deliver a tool that truly enhances transparency and accountability in the corporate world.

How does Windō answer an unmet need?

[Oli] For many organisations, the problem lies not in collecting sustainability data, but in presenting their findings and reaching the right audience. According to our research, FTSE100 sustainability reports are an average of 113 pages long, taking an average reader 3.5 hours to read cover to cover, at stark odds with Gen Z's preference for short-form, interactive content. This lack of visibility is costing organisations in talent, time and money. _87% of Gen Z professionals_ would quit their jobs to work somewhere with values more closely aligned to their own, while _49%_ say they have actually resigned from a job for this reason. As a result of this

churn, a company employing 100 graduates can expect to lose more than an estimated _£200K/$250K per year_. There is no platform out there that aggregates companies' data in the same way that we do in order to prevent that loss from happening.

What's in store for the future?

[Ken] We are in discussions with several major corporations regarding formal partnerships that allow them to better benefit from our platform, audience and insights. We are also building out two important tools - our own AI careers advisor named 'Winnie', which will be able to have a conversation with anyone, learn about their values, skills and preferred sector and location of work, and identify a company that matches on all of those levels. This is all backed up with data, and links to helpful resources and application pages. Winnie will also help candidates write cover letters and personalise applications to companies' progress.

Also, we are imminently launching an Early Careers Opprtunities Tracker which will house apprenticeships, internships, placements, insight days and full-time roles for large graduate employers. At Windō we hope to not only be a place for Gen Z to access data but to be a place that can connect young talent to an employer that shares their values and has an opportunity that matches their skills.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

[Oli] Take the right time to find the right co-founder! We (Ken and Oli) have very different professional backgrounds, which is a benefit for our business, but we also share the same values, live and breathe our business and - above all - have deep respect for each other.

[Ken] I would also add that content is king when building an audience,

and that persistence is key above all. If you really believe in your mission, then don't give up when you encounter hurdles.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?
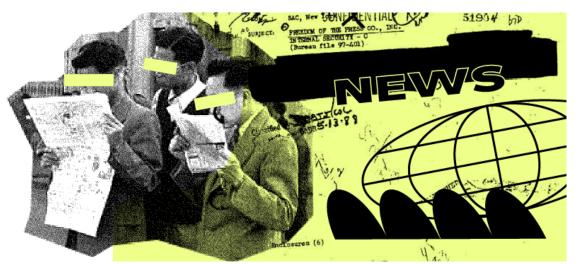
[Oli] My three-and-a-half-year-old son, Ozzy, wakes my wife and I up at about 6.30am, which is when I enjoy opening up my inbox to see what Ken's been working on since about 5am. After a coffee and breakfast I take my two cocker spaniels for an hour-long walk every morning without fail - this is when I will have team calls or listen to business podcasts (I'm currently listening to a lot of conversations about AI). I'm then at my desk until Ozzy comes home from school, where we will take the dogs out again. I usually then work again for a while, before putting my son to bed. Some days I will work late, if not I will relax with my wife in the evenings.

[Ken] I have a similar routine that helps me stay productive and balanced. Like Oli, I start my day early, typically around 5am. I find that the early morning is perfect for tackling complex data sets when my mind is at its sharpest. After crunching numbers and analysing data, I have breakfast with my husband, which is always a pleasant start to the day. By mid-morning, usually around 10am, I head to the gym. Exercise is crucial for keeping my energy levels up and maintaining a clear head for the rest of the day. After my workout, I dive back into work, often focusing on refining our platform's features and ensuring we stay on top of industry trends.

In the afternoon, I take my dogs for a walk in a nearby park. This break not only provides a chance to get some fresh air but also helps me decompress and recharge for any remaining tasks. I am very disciplined about switching off by the time my husband gets home from work around

6 pm. This allows me to maintain a healthy work-life balance and be fully present at home, ensuring that I can give my best both to Windō and my personal life.

Oli Coles is the CEO & cofounder and _Ken Janssens_ is Head of Social Impact & cofounder at _Windō._

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