

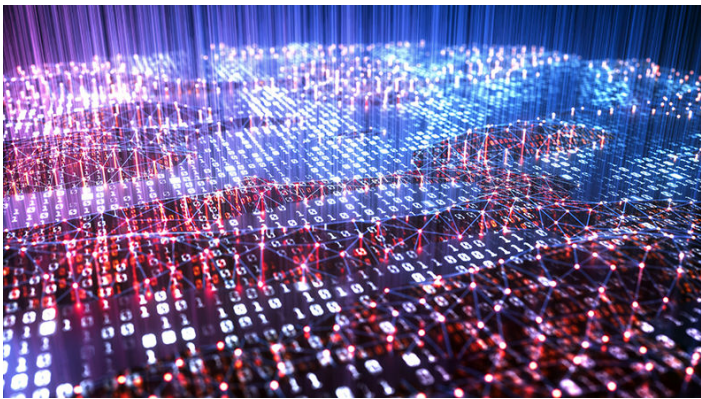
Why always-on connectivity will be fundamental for Gen Z seafarers

The 2021 Seafarer Workforce Report warned of a serious shortage of seafarers by 2026, a shortage that must be filled by Gen Z. But who are they and what do they want?

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A White Paper from KVH, the connectivity provider, says staying in touch is an expectation for tomorrow's seafarer. HR professionals must be at the heart of the connectivity discussion



GEN Z'S LOVE OF TECHNOLOGY COULD BE THE SOLUTION: KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS VIA SMARTPHONES, ALONG WITH EASY ACCESS TO ENTERTAINMENT, CAN EASE STRESS AND BURNOUT.

*Source: Kiyoshi Takahase
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GEN Z will be thrown into the spotlight during the coming decade as the global workforce ages and baby boomers retire.

It is important to understand the aims and aspirations of Gen Zers — born between 1996 and 2015 — who already make up 26% of the global population and will represent 27% of the workforce in just two years.

A White Paper from KVH, the Rhode Island-headquartered connectivity provider, cites a recent study by Dell reporting that technology would be a decisive factor in choosing a job for 91% of Gen Z respondents.

However, they said mental health and burnout — due to the intensity and demands of their work environments — were key concerns for this generation.

“When one considers the known demands and stress of a career at sea with the characteristics of those who will be working there,” KVH cautions, “it’s not difficult to recognise the issue facing the industry.”

It is a perfect storm, the company adds: the emergence of the Gen Zers as the prevalent generation in maritime employment and the effect of stress in their lives.

However, Gen Z’s love of technology could be the solution: keeping in touch with family and friends via smartphone, along with easy access to entertainment, can ease stress and burnout.

KVH first advocates simply recognising the change. Today’s seafarers have never lived a life without the Internet. They are accustomed to interacting with each other, and with their family and friends daily. This will not change when they’re at sea.

Connectivity has become a requirement for today’s crew, the white paper states. The shift is not only related to demographics, but also technology: new technologies are emerging to meet the needs of a new generation.

Questions about the cost of technology and how to integrate it used to sit with the IT department. In future, HR professionals must help determine benefits to find and keep employees on ships to overcome the seafarer shortage.

Collaboration between HR and IT is vital within organisations employing this next generation of seafarers.

Thirdly, solutions must tap into not only the Gen Z seafarer’s needs, but also their familiarity with technology. As technology advances, it inevitably becomes smaller in size and less complex, which is important for crew members who do not have time to learn complicated new processes or engage in multiple steps to accomplish their daily tasks.

Finally, while keeping the needs of Gen Zers in mind, an organisation must also meet the needs of other stakeholders, such as the IT team and its focus on cyber security.

“Connectivity is not only related to crew communications but also the mechanical, electrical, and operational systems of a vessel. Breaches can be devastating to a shipping company,” KVH says.

“Fleets and service providers should approach cyber security with a combination of integrated hardware and network controls.”

Shipping faces officer and ratings shortages over the coming decade. Gen Z will fill the gaps, but only if its specific needs and preferences are understood. Focusing on crucial issues such as connectivity will help shipping companies recruit and retain the workforce they need to grow their businesses in a changing world.

As the Q3 Seafarers Happiness Index report states: “Those who have the access they crave, and who are able to use it as they desire, are so much happier than those who don’t.”

By recognising the challenge and working towards solutions that meet not only the needs of the Gen Z seafarer, but also other stakeholders looking to make the business successful, decision makers can choose the right connectivity solutions to meet their goals.