

Oil Sands Reporter Interviews

Analysis

Fleishman-Hillard interviewed five American reporters and three Canadian reporters from various print sources to get a better understanding of how the oil sands are perceived in the media. They were each asked four questions relating to the oil sands. The questions were based on the quantity of oil sands stories being covered, the amount of pitches from environmental groups, oil and gas trends, and the general perception of the oil sands.

Their responses reveal that both Canadian and American reporters feel that, in general, they are covering more oil sands-related stories than they were even one year ago, and that although trends in the oil and gas industry can shift depending on pricing and environmental issues, the general perception of the Canadian oil sands is not a positive one.

1. How often have you been pitched by environmental groups?

US Reporter Responses

Not very often. I get pitches from companies pushing environmentally-friendly programs or devices, but rarely do I hear from Sierra Club or other environmental groups except for this time of year, when we're coming up on annual shareholder meetings. Then such groups want to ensure reporters know about their eco-shareholder proposals.

-Major U.S. Daily

I could not say exactly as I usually do not follow up with them.

-International Daily

Not very often.

-International Wire Service

Pembina Institute in Calgary. They're the best. Major environment and technology coverage.

-Major U.S. National Business Publication

I can't say, but it is increasing. It's frequent.

-Major U.S. Daily

Canadian Reporter Responses

Same amount as by any corporation, not too often.

-Major Canadian Daily

I am not really called by environmental groups, but I do get sent emails from them on occasion.

-Major Canadian Daily

Not very often.

-Major Canadian Daily

2. Are you covering more, less or the same number of oil and gas stories than 1 year ago? 5 years ago?

US Reporter Responses

More, given the state of oil prices and commodity prices overall. This makes for all kinds of stories, from effects on consumers to how companies grapple with shrinking access.

- Major U. Daily

Probably more.

-International Daily

More and more.

-International Wire Service

Wrote about them a couple years ago. Did a major front pager on this before NYT woke up and realized COS is a big deal. It is a big deal and it's important, but not much new happening from a news perspective.

- Major U.S. National Business Publication

More. There is a growing amount of interest in the oil sands with US audiences.

-Major U.S. Dailys

Canadian Reporter Responses

Within the last year, coverage has been roughly the same. Within the last five years it has increased.

-Major Canadian Daily

Covering oil and gas is all I do, and yes, I have been doing more than 5 years ago.

-Major Canadian Daily

More on both.

-Major Canadian Daily

3. Over the last year, what are the trend lines in the nature of coverage related to oil and gas stories in the media?

US Reporter Responses

Prices hitting new all-time records when the economy is in trouble means more stories on how the two are related. Everyone sees the effects of high commodity prices, from what they buy in the grocery store to driving patterns.

-Major U.S. Daily

Environment, national oil companies and resource nationalism.

-International Daily

I think the dominant trend is a focus on price and guessing what the future will bring. I think heavy crude is a focus, thanks partly to Hugo Chavez. I think the ethanol craze is beginning to fade as people realize it's no answer and takes food off the table. I think LNG is going to grow in importance. I also think at some point when people are faced with brownouts and blackouts, they will let us burn coal.

-Major International Daily

Waiting on a lot of M&A activity. Waiting to see if it "gets regulated to death." There's not much to talk about right now. Haven't written on it in a while. It's big and important but has no sex appeal. Cellulosic ethanol more appealing right now.

-Major U.S. Business Publication

Environment. Security of supply for the U.S.

-Major U.S. Daily

Canadian Reporter Responses

Environment issues are big, and oil sands projects as well.

-Major Canadian Daily

The environmental angle is huge, anything related to it is a big spin off story; royalty review is also a big deal; industry/government conflict another big issue, and oil patch issues.

-Major Canadian Daily

The trend is definitely going negative with a perception that oil and gas is dirty, harmful to the environment and that oil companies are too greedy. Readers use to welcome news about new development in the oil sands, but that has definitely cooled.

-Major Canadian Daily

4. Do you think that the general perception in Canada/US is that future investments in the oil sands is positive or negative?

US Reporter Responses

I think so far it's positive. Environmental concerns about oil sands activity doesn't seem to be well known in the U.S., but that awareness is growing. However, Canada is seen as friendly and risk-free compared to the Middle East, Russia and Venezuela, and there haven't been any reports of major problems with the cost.

-Major U.S. Daily

I don't think there is a general perception in the public. In the energy sector it is positive. In the environmental sector it's negative.

-International Daily

In Canada, positive. In the US, maybe less so due to environmental pressures.

-International Wire Service

Don't know if it's positive or negative. The major players are there. Guess that's good. They have no where else to go for major plays.

-Major U.S. Business Publication

Very little awareness in the US. But the story is an interesting one on the environmental and economic front. We are planning to do more.

-Major U.S. Daily

Canadian Reporter Responses

Mixed. People see the positive of investment and economic gain but negatives when they talk about the environment.

-Major Canadian Daily

It is negative

-Major Canadian Daily

Jury is still out. I think oil sands are viewed as a huge opportunity, but soaring costs and uncertainty stemming from CO2, higher taxes and royalties etc are taking some of the shine off Canada as an investment destination.

-Major Canadian Daily