

## Collaboration with Customers



**Sonal Jain**  
Head of Sustainability  
Workspace Group

**Workspace** is a leading provider of flexible working space and owns over 5.5m sq. ft. of space across London and the South East, providing a home to over 4,500 businesses.

We asked Sonal to share her insights on working with occupiers to deliver net zero carbon buildings.

### Why is important to work with occupiers?

“For a building to remain net zero carbon, it is crucial that its users understand what is required and how to use the building sustainably. If not, landlords will not meet their net zero targets.”

### What approach do you take to collaborating with customers at Workspace?

“It starts with us doing the right thing, demonstrating our credentials and commitment to sustainability, ensuring the buildings are built sustainably and are equipped with the right kit, before asking our customers to work with us to reduce energy consumption and cut waste.

It’s also about understanding what we can influence. At Workspace, we provide most of the equipment in the tenants’ space, such as the lighting and the air conditioning, which is different

to many commercial landlords where tenants undertake the fit-out. So we play our part by providing the best-in-class office space and then the journey begins on educating and engaging customers to use the space efficiently.”

### And how do you engage customers?

“Our engagement strategy is multi-faceted. We put up posters across our buildings to nudge energy efficiency behaviour, we publish customer newsletters to raise awareness and we have also launched a portal where customers can see all the sustainability data about their building and can benchmark performance against other customer units in the building.”

### Is the feedback from customers always positive?

“We get lots of great feedback from customers. However, we are also challenged by customers who, for example, might say that they want to be energy efficient but were too cold or too hot when working. We know we need to strike the right balance; we want to cut energy consumption whilst making sure that our customers are productive and comfortable.”

### How do you strike the right balance?

“We try to make it as easy as possible for our customers to save energy, and this means utilising technology effectively.

We now live in a hybrid-working world. There are less people in the office on Mondays and Fridays, and more in the middle of the week. And there are fewer buildings that run on the traditional 7am to 7pm, 5 days a week model. So what we have done is to use technology to put in place control strategies that reflect the usage of the building. So if a customer forgets to turn off the air conditioning then we have our building controls which will automatically turn off the air conditioning taking feedback from absence detection sensors.

And this has been received well. We know our customers want to save energy, but this isn't always at the front of their minds. So we try and make behaviour change as easy as possible."

## What channels do you use to engage and inform your customers?

"We have set up green groups across our buildings to share knowledge, collaborate and deliver new sustainability initiatives, such as our zero waste programme. We also use these groups to discuss what more we can do to engage our wider customer base.

We've entered a couple of our buildings into the **CUBE competition** which has been a great way to bring people together and deliver a whole building approach to improving our energy performance. I think gamification has a definite role to play in engaging customers and tenants. I'm not suggesting that something like this can be scaled across all of our buildings and delivered every year but this has worked well in the two buildings that we've entered into the competition.

We publish a monthly building-specific sustainability newsletter, where we report energy, water and waste performance, publish top tips and highlight successes.

As touched on earlier, we've also launched our customer portal which provides full transparency of sustainability data and the ability to benchmark consumption performance."

## You mentioned top tips. What practical advice are you giving to customers?

"It might sound minor but an "always on" approach to sustainability engagement has worked well for us. We have put up posters in our buildings to nudge customers to change things that are in their direct control, like closing the monitor at the end of the day, turning off the print overnight or using lifts less. We also use posters to drive better

waste and recycling behaviour.

But as we touched on earlier, we also use technology and use sensors and timed controls to turn off lighting and appliances. So we're not relying on human intervention too much. I think this is where all landlords should be heading. For Workspace, trying to nudge our 40,000 customers to change their behaviours is going to be a very slow process, which is why we think using technology is key."

## What advice would you give to a landlord who wants to work with their tenants to improve their building's energy performance?

"First of all, you need to practice what you preach. If a landlord is running an inefficient building with an old gas boiler and lighting but is asking customers to cut their energy use, then that message is probably not going to be very well received. You need to walk the talk.

Secondly, you need to look at how you can make it as easy as possible for tenants to change their behaviours, and I think technology has a key role here.

And thirdly, you need to recognise that collaboration is an ongoing process. You can't just collaborate with tenants once or twice and think that everything will fall into place. Engagement needs to be "always on" and there needs to be regular feedback. There's no end date to collaboration. You need to think long-term."

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