

## Operational Rather than Aspirational: Planet Mark's Avital Johanan on FM and Net Zero

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Speaking exclusively to FM Business Daily, Avital Johanan, Managing Director of carbon reduction certification body, [Planet Mark](#), discusses the practical steps FM teams need to take to move beyond high-level sustainability commitments, why assured data is the foundation of credible ESG reporting, and how continuous carbon reduction is now expected, rather than a differentiator.

Avital has spent much of her career helping businesses of all sizes bridge the gap between ambition and operational reality. Planet Mark works with members across a broad spectrum of sustainability maturity, from businesses just beginning to understand what carbon measurement involves, through to those tackling the complexities of scope 3 supply chain emissions. The common thread, Avital said, is the need to make sustainability.

The first step is the hardest

For FM teams with a clear net zero vision but uncertainty about where to begin, Avital identified a consistent set of hurdles. “Typically, the biggest challenge we see is turning it into an operating plan that businesses can use day-to-day,” she said. “Every business struggles when something is unknown. It requires getting all your service partners together, getting that initial commitment to a net zero future, educating internal teams, understanding what resources you are going to need and what support is available.”

She pointed to the experience of Regular Cleaning, an FM member whose head of ESG she had recently

spoken with. He described the need for “the courage to move from the vision to actionable, measurable carbon reductions, and really believing that you can make a difference and committing to that process”. For that business, Planet Mark’s reporting framework provided the structure and scaffolding to make the transition real.

In practical terms, Avital said this means starting with a credible baseline, establishing clear data ownership, and then setting prioritised actions aligned to the maintenance and renewal cycle. “Treat it really like an operational project, but bring in measured carbon and cost outcomes,” she explained. “Where we see that work really well is when the ESG or operational leader sits across the business, engaging and empowering employees and aligning their knowledge with their expertise, whether that is transport or procurement.”

For organisations at an earlier stage of their sustainability journey, she was equally direct. “The basics are getting the board to really understand what “net zero” means. Getting clarity on why the business is doing this, whether that is customer pressure, regulation, brand enhancement, cost savings or energy risk, makes it a far more practical and meaningful starting point. We always say: Start simply. Start with measuring. You cannot manage what you do not measure.”

#### The case for third-party assurance

Annual, independently assured carbon data is non-negotiable if an organisation wants its ESG reporting to stand up to scrutiny. “The scrutiny may be audits, board reporting, external clients, landlords, auditors or procurement. You cannot credibly show any progress without it,” Avital said. “Establishing a boundary, knowing what you are measuring, assessing data quality and doing that year-on-year creates an auditable story of progress. And that is often the starting point for getting people engaged, whether that is colleagues, service partners or clients, all pushing towards the same goal.” She also noted that Planet Mark does significant work for members at the start of their measurement journey to normalise data so that growing businesses are not penalised for expansion, ensuring year-on-year comparisons remain meaningful. This helps our Members establish their measurement processes and work up to measuring their full net zero baseline.”

For FM teams specifically, Avital saw the commercial opportunity as significant. Assured, improving data transforms a supplier from a transactional partner into a trusted one. “Helping your own clients meet their net zero targets, cutting their carbon emissions through the services and products you deliver, makes you a solution provider. But to be a partner, your data has to be trusted and has to be improving over time.”

#### Certification as a procurement differentiator

With ESG moving from a tick-box exercise towards a core evaluation metric in procurement and tendering, Avital described how recognised certification changes the nature of the conversation. “It is a consistent and credible proof point and a common language. It is an auditable submission you can provide with tenders. It moves you from having a policy, which is basically intention, to being asked what your evidence is, what you are doing, what outcomes you are seeing,” she said.

She drew a clear distinction between the value of well intentioned, often generic, policies, and validated carbon footprints. “Your carbon footprint and the net zero planning you can build from it, are about your action and the impact you are having. They are specific to your business, and

that is when it becomes a differentiator. It is a story about you and your business, and it helps you win work.”

She noted, however, that the premium once attached to sustainability credentials is eroding. Large real estate owners and landlords, she observed, are increasingly unwilling to absorb additional costs simply because a supplier claims to be more sustainable. “It is becoming expected. It is a differentiator because it shows you are ahead in the market, but increasingly it is becoming part of the service, not something people are willing to pay a premium for.”

### Engaging the supply chain

Scope 3 emissions, those generated within an organisation’s supply chain, represent the biggest sustainability challenge facing the FM sector. “It is probably the biggest challenge, not just for people in the FM space but for everyone trying to tackle their scope 3,” Avital said. “It’s about being practical, being targeted and sharing responsibility with those suppliers, taking it away from the abstract and making it something you are working on together.”

Her advice was to start with the categories an organisation can genuinely influence: maintenance contractors, cleaning, waste, catering and logistics. “Be really clear about what you want from them and make it easy for them to provide it. We work extensively on making sure we have a simple but consistent framework for bringing that data, those plans and those targets into one place.”

Critically, she stressed that supplier engagement only works when it creates value for the supplier as well. “Make it so the output for the supplier is in a format they can share with other clients, not just with you. Otherwise, they keep being asked by multiple clients to do the same thing and it becomes a headache. Supplier engagement should ideally go beyond data and provide a space for innovation and opportunity. “Put in place joint plans that reduce cost carbon or waste, encourage them to test material substitutions to help develop low carbon products, work with them to optimise delivery routes and transport modes: these are the kinds of initiatives that create genuine motivation on both sides.”

### Protecting long-term asset value

Avital’s final point addressed the regulatory environment and the role that continuous certification plays in protecting the long-term value of built assets. “It’s about staying current and credible,” she said. “Annual measurement and reporting is essential, historic data will not hold up to customer scrutiny or regulatory change.”

In practical terms for FM teams, this supports defensible capital expenditure planning, prioritising upgrades aligned to renewal cycles and reducing both regulatory and reputational risk. “Every time we start a new measurement cycle with a member, we ensure we are representing normal operations and updating when they change, reflecting acquisitions, growth and new markets, so the data is credible and relevant.”

She was also keen to highlight Planet Mark’s role in shaping the regulatory landscape itself. “We are one of the largest providers of net zero certification and we have been doing this for 13 years. We work closely with government and regulators and the people setting those standards. We do not just implement them; we are in those conversations, guiding future regulation and making sure it’s adoptable and practical for business, then translating that back to our members so they can act on it.”



For FM directors navigating an environment of tightening regulation, rising client expectations and constrained budgets, Avital's message was consistent throughout: start with measurement, report annually, and build from there. "You do not have to start with net zero. You need to just start with measurement."

To find out more about Planet Mark and how it can support your sustainability journey, visit [www.PlanetMark.com](http://www.PlanetMark.com).