

Guest Column: Flying toward net zero

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [September 2021 WTCE Virtual](#) digital edition, on [page 34](#).



Alison Wells, Co-Founder and Director, Plane Talking Products

We may be seeing light at the end of the tunnel in terms of travel opportunities opening up. [Plane Talking Products](#) has felt and shared the pain of our customers in the last 18 months. Previously, we were busy developing, manufacturing and dispatching products. Overnight, production lines stopped

and warehouses filled up. It's been hugely challenging for the entire industry, and change is in the air.

As we emerge from the depths of the pandemic, it's a time of reset and renewal. Digital transformation is accelerating, working practices changing, and now is the time to transform our approach to sustainability. With public commitments made by governments around the world and the airline sector itself, change is essential to become net zero by 2050.

For our part, Plane Talking has been exploring ways to become more sustainable. This isn't just about working in greener ways and supplying more sustainable products; but also looking at our end-to-end supply chain and making as many positive changes as we can to reduce impacts on the environment.

The obvious ones are material choice and production methods; we are developing products made of new and more sustainable materials. However, we need to go further and look at, for example, the locations of production facilities and shipping to points of consumption. Logistics is an important piece of the jigsaw. Filling containers properly, using EV and hybrid vehicles, and so on. We've been working with a UK-based company that's developing tech to harness wind power for tankers and container ships. This exceeds the 80 percent carbon reduction that must be achieved by this sector to meet its on net zero targets. It's an exciting development, so watch this space.

For the products themselves, we need to keep asking important questions comparing rotatable to disposable, waste management practices, on and after a flight, product lifecycle tracking and other areas. As suppliers, how can we reduce packaging around products whilst ensuring they're still clean and fresh? How can technology be used to only load onboard what's actually needed?

It will be interesting to see how passengers react to the changes in onboard service that will inevitably come. Will passengers choose an airline based on its messages around sustainability onboard and not only through initiatives in fuel and choice of aircraft? Will people find it acceptable to reuse products onboard?

Of course, it's impossible to discuss net zero in the travel sector and anywhere else without mentioning money. Cost will inevitably be a factor in making more sustainable choices. But this change is something that we have to do. Looking at the total lifecycle cost of a product can help airlines and their suppliers and partners to decide where and how to direct and prioritize investments to have the greatest impacts.

One thing is clear from conversations we're having with Plane Talking clients and prospects: the importance of working together to find the best ways forward, listening and responding to issues raised on all sides, and innovating. We've already taken off on this journey and we're all in it together. The question is, how can we navigate our route to net zero, and land safely and profitably?