

VOICE by Maddyness: Meet Farah Kabir, cofounder of HANX

Our first guest on the VOICE by Maddyness podcast is Farah, cofounder of sexual wellness and intimate health brand HANX. The idea for the business came after an awkward encounter with her boss while shopping for condoms on her lunch break.

The incident made Farah consider the branding of condoms and how the mainstream brands in the field had packaging in garish colours that predominantly targeted male shoppers. After much research and consideration, she and cofounder and best friend Dr Sarah Welsh launched HANX late in 2017. But how did they get there?

“I started out in investment banking, which requires an analytical hat. As a chartered accountant, data is king for me,” said Farah. “Working in a highly pressurised, fast-paced environment like Goldman Sachs has really taught me to think on my feet and understand the commercials of a business.

“Sarah’s expertise as a gynaecology doctor is what makes HANX customer-centric: seeing patients whose sexual health was directly affected by intimate products on the market meant that we had a really solid ground for product development. We’re very much a yin and yang relationship and our working styles really compliment and balance each other.

“It’s amazing to think that we were childhood best friends and now we’re

cofounders. We first met in chemistry class over the flicker of a bunsen burner and years later, we're still blazing a trail for sexual wellness and women's health."

Extending the brand for wellness

Farah and Sarah undertook extensive research before the launch to ensure the product they created met women's desires for condoms. From this survey, they discovered that sustainability, ingredients and the scent of condoms were all important to women.

Based on their findings, HANX launched with vegan condoms and lubricants that had an aesthetic targeting female customers. There's little debate that HANX condoms are one of the most attractive on the market: the slick white packaging and gold type is something you're more inclined to put on your mantelpiece rather than want to hide away.

But HANX has evolved to so much more than a condom and lubricant brand. HANX Fix launched in September 2020, an online service developed to help customers remedy vaginal health treatments in just a couple of clicks. Shoppers can purchase relief from thrush, BV and cystitis, and get guidance along the way.

"We've always set out to serve women from their first time to first child and beyond, and HANX Fix is an extension of that plan," said Farah. "We actually brought the launch forward in response to our customers desperately seeking convenience during COVID.

"No one wants to queue or leave the house right now: even more so if you're feeling the effects of conditions like thrush, BV or cystitis. It's a really unique service in that they're dispensed the same day you order and are delivered straight to your door, so you can put the rush on thrush without leaving the sofa.

"We're a gynae-backed brand who care about our community. We've been there, done that and as a result, want to take the stress out of dealing with intimate health issues for everyone."

"The reaction to HANX Fix has been huge! We're really grateful and humbled

by the response and have seen really encouraging feedback from our community that we're essentially their one-stop-shop for sexual wellness and intimate health. That's exactly what we set out to do."

There is also the HANX Forum and podcast, further extending the reach and potential of the brand.

"We always envisioned HANX as a holistic package, offering products, knowledge and services," added Farah. "We want to be the go-to knowledge hub for women's health, from daughters to mothers, sisters and aunts."

The challenges of advertising

Despite HANX's intentions and offering being far from seedy, it still gets categorised alongside adult brands when it comes to advertising. This makes it difficult to advertise HANX on platforms that could significantly boost awareness of the brand.

"Being placed in the 'adult' space is really challenging, because we want to better women's health with no-nonsense products that actually work and you're constantly trying to prove that," said Farah.

"It's taking time and we're slowly chipping away at the restrictions in place. For example, performance marketing can be tricky at times as our products allude to safe sex, lubrication and so on, so it's never a given that they'll be approved. Even our HANX Fix platform for vaginal health treatments isn't safe from advertising restrictions: we're talking about vaginas, thrush, irritation and women's health, but we've really struggled to get them out there.

"It takes dedication, a lot of headspace and champions to support us, including – but not limited to – female leaders in corporate positions to help us challenge the status quo. Fellow founders in similar spaces have voiced that they come up against the same challenges so we're not alone, but it can sometimes feel like it's invalidating as a brand.

"Despite that, we're fortunate to have a loyal community, their word of mouth, a dedicated ambassador programme, engaged social following and organic growth on our side, so we can lean less on traditional advertising methods where possible."

Celebrating the highs

With a team of four behind the scenes and £1.2M of investment to date, the

future looks bright for HANX. Now stocked in major retailers such as Boots, the brand has successfully addressed a gap in the market, excelled in its offering for women's sexual and intimate health, and has built a trusting community along the way. With all of this in mind, what has been the highlight so far?

"Launching a challenger brand when many people said it couldn't be done!" said Farah. "It's really encouraging when customers drop us a line to tell us they love what we do or that we've changed their lives – seriously!"

"Working with our small team through lockdown has also brought joy. It's been a wild, unpredictable ride and we'd be nothing without our team and our incredible customers."

Interested in learning more about the story behind HANX? Listen to the [first episode of the VOICE by Maddyness podcast](#), available now.

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