

5 things I wish I'd been told before building a femtech company

Building a femtech company is a unique experience. Unlike other startup sectors, many femtech products are still considered 'taboo'. But it's a space that's growing fast; ripe for innovation and investment.

Having just secured pre-seed funding for our pioneering at-home fertility treatment, [Béa Fertility](#) – set to launch in the UK later this year – here are five things I wish I'd known before starting out.

1. Building a femtech product takes time and patience

I always knew that building a new health company would be a lengthy process. But it wasn't until I was in it that I truly appreciated what this meant. My co-founder David went through over 90 product design iterations before landing on our current design for the Béa Kit, and we're still refining it based on feedback and benchtop testing using an anatomical medical model. This process required a significant amount of patience and a fair amount of cash. Factoring in a longer financial runway than you think you might need is vital. A fellow medtech founder told me you need to be able to take as much time as you need, because when you're dealing with something as important as women's health your product has to be right. You can't afford to cut corners

and risk your users' safety.

2. Talking about things like sperm, the cervix and intracervical insemination in front of large groups of people is par for the course

When you launch a femtech company, it's inevitable that you'll have to stand up in front of audiences and talk about intimate parts of the body. If you're pitching for accelerators, grants or VC investment, these audiences are likely to be male-dominated. This can feel uncomfortable at first, particularly when the men you're talking to have mixed levels of understanding in the areas you're discussing.

As a femtech founder, part of your job is to address important women's health issues head on. You are there to tear down the taboos that have stymied innovation for too long.

Ultimately, you will quickly get used to others' discomfort. At the same time, you'll be fuelled by those who connect with your mission.

3. Things can get real pretty quickly

The thing about femtech is that it's revolutionary. Some of the solutions that are coming to market are total game-changers for women's health and wellbeing. If your product is good and you're solving a true problem, things can move very quickly.

Hearing from women who are excited about what you're doing and can't wait to try it out is the most rewarding thing about launching a femtech company. It's acutely personal for so many people; those who finally feel heard and empowered by your offering. This is incredible – and it's the reason we're all here. But the sudden buzz and interest that can come when you take your idea public, particularly when you're used to beaver away quietly behind the

scenes, can be overwhelming after the time you spend quietly working away on your product.

Before talking publicly about your new product, I'd recommend putting processes in place that will enable you to have boundaries whilst staying engaged with the people who are getting in touch. You might decide to look at messages and respond to comments at a certain time every week; or to set up a system that helps you to prioritise the most important communications from supporters. Do whatever works best for you, but be prepared for that transition from pre-launch to public-facing femtech.

4. Peoples' stories will continue to move you

Despite growing accustomed to interacting with potential customers, I realise now that I will never be able to shield myself from the emotion that comes with working in femtech. Talking to women who are currently awaiting or undergoing fertility treatment is as confronting (and sometimes heartbreaking) now as it was when I was first starting out with Béa. I continue to be shocked by stories of people who've racked up thousands of pounds of debt using sperm donors and fertility clinics, or those who have been upsold 'add-ons' to treatment that have little clinical backing. The personal stories provide a daily reminder as to why I got into femtech and they motivate me to make it a resounding success.

5. It's okay to laugh sometimes

Sometimes there will be genuine moments of humour along your femtech journey. It's important not to take things too seriously and remember that humour is a good thing. Launching any product is tough, but particularly one that is in the business of women's health. Being able to laugh with colleagues, investors and customers makes it a more human process and can drive authentic connection.

I was once demonstrating how our insemination device would work for a virtual investor pitch; at just the wrong moment the prototype fell off my desk and broke, the funnel flew out of my hand and hit the wall behind me, and the whole demo fell to pieces. It was mortifying but quite funny, and laughing about it with the audience made the moment pass.

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