Meet Embody, privacy-forward tech for the betterment of women and people with cycles

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Anna Hall, CEO of encrypted period tracking app Embody, about cycle syncing, privacy and freedom tech.

What was the catalyst for launching Embody?

The catalyst for launching _Embody_ was twofold:

1) At 33 I was diagnosed with a pre-menstrual disorder. I had never heard of cycle-based disorders before, and I began learning about the four phases of the menstrual cycle. I learned how to change my habits and daily practices to support the symptoms that came with each different phase of my cycle. This is often referred to as "cycle syncing" – and it was life-changing. I began tracking my cycle and symptoms closely using the tools I had at the time – period trackers on my phone and pen and paper.

2) In June 2022, Roe v. Wade was overturned. We heard from security experts that we should delete any trace of menstrual health data from our phones and 'go back to pen and paper'. The concern is that period trackers have a sordid history of selling women's data to third parties, and now, post-Roe, that data

can be easily subpoenaed and used against us in a court of law in the case of a suspected abortion. Now, a tool I used daily was no longer safe.

These two events led to the creation of Embody which focuses on supporting women through all four phases of their menstrual cycle and is private by default, meaning your data does not touch the cloud or another server without your explicit permission.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Embody's mission is to provide menstruators with the tools to fully embrace their cycles. It's more than a "period tracking app" – it's designed as a fully comprehensive cycle wellness app that empowers users to understand each of the four phases of their menstrual cycles, and take ownership of their personal health data. Crucially, one of our core values at Embody is protecting the data of our users. We're private by default, which means we don't gather any personal data on our users unless they allow it in the in-app privacy settings. Even then, that data can't be tied to any personal information in your account. More on that _here_.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

The company started as idea in July of 2022, and by September we received initial funding and began building our team. The app was in development by December, and in August we launched in closed beta.

Tell us about the working culture at Embody.

First off, we are all menstruators at Embody. This will likely not always be the case, but it's been really a unique tech environment, and it has largely shaped our work culture as a small team. We share where we are in our cycles and use that information to plan our work – it really makes a difference.

How are you funded?

We received our initial funding from _Thesis_* – a privacy-focused cryptography venture studio that specialises in freedom tech. We are not fundraising at the moment, but will be spinning out on our own in the coming months.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Our biggest challenge so far has been finding an online space where women are comfortable talking about the problems that Embody is trying to solve. These kinds of health matters are deeply personal, and the legal changes in the US that have resulted from the overturning of Roe v. Wade mean that women often feel like they are unsafe in online communities. Coupled with the longstanding cultural stigma around menstruation and menstrual health, there are several barriers we need to overcome. But we're confident that providing the right spaces and tools, we can create a culture of open discussion.

How does Embody answer an unmet need?

Embody is private by default, meaning we don't gather any of your personal data. This level of privacy is unprecedented, and crucial in a post-Roe era. And while we've built this privacy infrastructure for menstrual health data, we believe that all people have the right to personal data security when it comes to information about their health.

By giving users the ability to track the symptoms during each phase of their cycles, we give users the knowledge they need to optimize their physical and mental health – for example, how hard to work out at the gym during a given phase, to how many social events they should stack in their calendars. All of the educational content is designed to be very experience-centric, rooted in science, and caters to all forms of wellness: mental, physical, and emotional.

What's in store for the future?

We're currently working on building towards our public launch. And while the app's basic features will always be free for users, we're working on creating a premium subscription that will provide additional access to educational content and community resources. We're also working on a social feature where users

can safely connect with their IRL friends to share about their experiences and learn from each other.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

It's all about choosing where to focus your energy, and it is constant learning. Remain curious, open, and refer back to your initial purpose to guide you.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I'm a mom, a partner – I care a lot about my family and friends, AND I'm a CEO, so my daily routine is fairly busy and structured.

I wake up around 6:30, shower, get dressed, make a smoothie and coffee. Drink the smoothie, take my meds, and THEN start sipping the coffee (this was guidance given to me by a nutritionist I worked with to ease my PMDD symptoms, there's science behind this order!) I then chase my coffee around while getting the kids dressed, taking care of the dog, walking my second-grader to the bus stop, and then leaving by car to drop my 4-year-old off at preschool. I usually listen to music or a podcast on the drive from drop off to work and get mentally prepared for the day ahead by enjoying the alone time – something I've learned I need as much as coffee in the mornings.

At work, I always begin by writing down the day's schedule along with a list of priorities for the day. As much as I live in the digital world, I like to have this moment of pen and paper time to start my work day. Then I follow that schedule! It's important to me, as a leader of a wellness focused company, to take time for rest (especially during my luteal and menstrual phases), nourishment, and movement throughout the work day, so I usually have those as explicit items in my schedule.

I almost always leave work by 5pm to go home, turn off work mode, enjoy my family, eat dinner together, and put the kids to bed. After kid bedtime, there may be a bit more work, reconnection with my partner, or rest, depending on how I'm feeling and what needs the most attention at the moment. I've started a bit of a night ritual where I journal (sometimes related to my cycle!), reflect on the day, and clear my mind before reading a bit and shutting everything off for the night. Then it starts again!

I like this routine, but I also like freedom and variety, so I have one day in the week, Tuesdays, where I plan for no plan and have the day to do what needs doing the most; whether that's having a rest day to myself, whiteboarding new product ideas, connecting with my kids, or just enjoying a normal work day. I have to add that we have quite the 'village' supporting our family, since both my partner and I are running companies at the moment.

We live close to grandparents, good friends, and have a nanny to help with the daily tasks of raising a family. Support is KEY. Weekends are for rest, adventure, or both ⬜ While this all sounds good on paper, life happens, especially with kids in the mix, and we often have to break from the ideal schedule and reset when we can.

Anna Hall is the CEO of *Embody*.

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