

How can startups change the menopause for good?

Menopause is a market ripe for innovation, and startups are beginning to chase this opportunity internally and externally. While there are significant challenges to tackling the issue, brands that choose to sideline menopause as a 'women's issue' rather than a business issue will miss out.

Temps de lecture : minute

3 May 2022

When it comes to menopause, a long history of damaging stereotypes has forced it into a pile of 'women's problems' that are swept under the carpet, along with its 48 recognised symptoms. But the menopause is an issue that affects us all. With 15.5M women as well as trans people currently going through the menopause, we all know someone experiencing it, whether it's a spouse, relative, colleague or friend.

GenM's *Invisibility Report* shows that a huge 87% of menopausal women feel overlooked by brands and society. Furthermore, an overwhelming 97% believe that companies should work hard to cater for it, while 88% would like their workplaces to be better set up for menopausal workers.

Being inclusive

Evidently, there is space here for brands and employers to explore. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it can - if done responsibly and authentically - help fuel growth, winning hearts, minds and a share of this untapped market. It's an opportunity that startups would be foolish to ignore.

As the saying goes, change starts from within; there's no point catering for menopausal consumers without practicing what you preach internally.

Menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the workforce. They offer a wealth of valuable skills and experience which employers can't afford to ignore. But with one study showing that a quarter of women with serious menopause symptoms have had to leave their jobs, this is exactly what is happening.

What's more, with the Invisibility Report revealing that 75% of menopausal women still feel that it cannot be openly discussed, employees with symptoms are suffering in silence. Creating an environment where those in this life stage feel valued and supported is vital, and ensures you'll get the best out of them, whilst helping to improve employee satisfaction and retention.

A startup approach

Naturally, startups are more agile than big companies. They can respond much faster to the needs of their consumers and staff, often beating longer-standing industry players at their own game. Startups can use this advantage to develop products and services that fulfil menopause-specific needs faster than competitors. They can also review their existing ranges, and if relevant, improve how they are signposted and marketed to menopausal consumers.

Take HotTea Mama, for example. The UK tea brand saw an opportunity to reach the menopause market and ran with it, launching an award-winning blend to support the body through the tough menopause transition.

Another success story in the menopause arena is Elle Sera. Launched during the pandemic, the daily supplement brand is changing the menopause conversation and uplifting women's wellbeing. The brand's Empowerment Pill helps alleviate some of the most common menopausal symptoms, like loss of libido, fatigue and low mood.

As GenM founding partners, both Elle Sera and HotTea Mama have joined our collective of over 50 responsible and forward-thinking brands, big and small, alongside the likes of Marks & Spencer, Simba, Lyma and Co-op. Together, we are working to improve the menopause experience for all through normalising the conversation and better catering to 'the change' in products, services, signposting, marketing and internal policies.

We founded GenM when we entered perimenopause (the stage before menopause) ourselves and felt completely abandoned at this lifestage by the brands we had been loyal to for decades. There was so little information available, such poor signposting to menopause-friendly products, if any at all.

In fact, our research shows that a huge 91% of menopausal women have never seen any specific advertising or marketing for menopause products.

Clearly this shows an opportunity for responsible companies to cater to this market, winning the custom and loyalty of menopausal consumers.

At GenM, we believe that women deserve better, and we're looking for forward-thinking startups and industry leaders alike to join our collective. Working together, we can become a voice too loud to ignore and help to improve the experience during this pivotal life stage for millions of women across the UK and the world.

Sam Simister and Heather Jackson are cofounders of *GenM*, the menopause partner for over 40 brands such as Marks & Spencer, Boots and Next.

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