

Meet luna, the app that gives reliable, judgement-free advice for teens

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Jo Goodall and Jas Schembri-Stothart, cofounders of luna about teenhood, the importance of anonymity and combatting misinformation on social media.

Temps de lecture : minute

23 April 2024

What was the catalyst for launching luna?

[Jo] We founded luna after meeting on our MBA programme at Oxford Saïd Business School in 2021. The idea actually came from a University project we both had to complete as part of our course where we had to come up with a business idea and pitch it to investors and our professors, a bit like Dragons' Den. We ended up pitching the idea for luna here and were encouraged by the investors and professors to start the business once we graduated - so we did it and here we are now!

[Jas] In terms of the idea itself, we realised there were lots of apps out there to help older women with different issues they were experiencing, but nothing for teens - the reality is that teens are relying heavily on TikTok to access information about their health and wellbeing. This is at best unreliable and, at worst, dangerous. We also felt that we could have been better supported and educated when we were younger as we still have a lot of unknowns about our bodies - we wanted to make sure this isn't the case for teens in 2024 so decided to build luna to help them!

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

[Jas] The *luna app* is an AI-driven health and wellbeing companion for teens. Cycle tracking, educational content, and anonymous questions together form a digital guide to teenhood – the first of its kind. luna’s goal is simple: to educate, empower and support teens in all of the situations they find themselves in – from period leaks to skin problems and toxic friendships. Their “problems” are all valid in luna’s eyes, however big or small they may be in the grand scheme of things – this is a huge part of what has helped luna retain an amazingly loyal community, and grow at pace. Behind the articles, videos and answers to questions is a team of doctors and safeguarding experts, who make sure content is medically accurate and appropriate for a teenage audience – there’s no user generated content on luna, so parents know their teen is in safe hands. In terms of how we reach customers, this is done by focusing on 4 key pillars: social media, schools, word of mouth, and cross-sharing audiences with partner brands. Each one helps us connect with teens and parents, who are both vital to luna’s growth.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

[Jo] The largest pivot we’ve made at luna so far, albeit pre launch, was in the early stages of the journey during co-creation with our users. Our initial product idea was that both parents/guardians and teens would be on the same luna platform, so there was an element of monitoring on the app. However, after speaking to our potential users, they quickly informed us that they wouldn’t use a platform their parents/guardians were also using directly.

We quickly iterated and moved on from the idea of parents/guardians being on the same platform as teens, and instead implemented anonymity across the platform to ensure teen's independence but also keep the community protected. We completely respect and understand the need for parents to stay abreast of what young people are thinking, searching and feeling; as a result, we keep parents in the loop with a newsletter and, in the future, we plan to launch a new platform that provides aggregated insights from luna to shed light into what's top of mind for teens.

Since launching, the focus for the business has been largely on making product improvements based on community behaviour, engagement and insights - essentially improving the product as a whole optimising features in the app that teens are enjoying and getting the most value from.

Tell us about the working culture at luna

[Jas] One of luna's core brand values is "empathy", but this doesn't just exist for our community and it absolutely isn't performative - behind the scenes, we practise what we preach. We're a very small team, not just because we're a startup, but because we believe in optimising processes and finding smarter solutions to manual problems. In time, this will pay off, and in the short term it's rewarding but challenging work. All this means that checking in with each other, working as one team, and being aware of our influence over each other is a huge part of our day-to-day.

[Jo] Startup culture isn't about being a cog in the machine, it's about being a contributor to all aspects of the business - that's why wellbeing is such a big focus for us, because there's a knock on effect if anyone's struggling. A fun example of this is that recently Jas introduced a 'movement' group chat! Each week, anyone who wants to get involved (currently, everyone!) can set their exercise targets for the week, and the team makes sure they can carve out the time to get this done and

celebrates completed goals together – whether it’s a step goal, a gym visit number or star jumps.

How are you funded?

[Jas] I’d love to say that luna has been bootstrapped, however my MBA sucked up all my savings - I’m not complaining though as without it I’d wouldn’t have met Jo and luna wouldn’t exist!

We’ve raised £1.2M in funding and are backed by some incredible investors including Octopus Ventures and Syndicate Room who were at our first MBA pitch - it’s thanks to their words of encouragement that we left the Corporate world to build luna. Notable female Angel investors we’re extremely proud to have on our cap table include Sharmadean Reid (Founder, The Stack), Elizabeth Rossiello (CEO & Founder of Aza Finance), and Louise Hill (Co- Founder and CEO, GoHenry).

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

[Jas] Let’s be honest – learning about their health isn’t always fun for teens, and luna’s had a major challenge in combatting the huge swathes of misinformation on social media (e.g. dangerous weight loss hacks) in a way that appeals to young people. It’s much easier to get a piece trending if it offers magic fixes, rather than the actual facts which often takes more work and can be a harder sell.

To overcome this, we’ve drilled right down into the mindset of the community and their communication style. Firstly, on our community’s mindset: we benefit massively from the app’s anonymous questions feature “ask luna”, as well as a feedback box, which gives us a direct line into the mindset of teens. We can use this to tap into trends and topics of interest, at a time that suits them. This frees us up from educating in a

curriculum style, at a stage they're not necessarily interested in or ready for.

Secondly, on our community's communication style: we have developed and honed our tone of voice based on how our community speaks to us – via anonymous questions, social media comments, in-person chats, and feedback messages. All of this has helped us become a (slightly sassy) “older sister” (supported by a team of young, aspirational medics!) who truly gets what these teens are going through.

How does luna answer an unmet need?

[Jo] The latest generation of teens, Gen Z and Gen Alpha, are digital natives; and so it may come as no surprise that they're learning much of what isn't covered in school via social media – which is a hotbed of misinformation. This is partly because learning materials on these topics in schools are not engaging enough, or aren't well resourced enough, to truly cover what's needed in a way that suits teens (often, privately!). But as an alternative hasn't been provided, they turn to social media for answers. There's a need for a medically verified resource, that can supply teens with the answers to their questions, when they need it, in a style they want it.

And that's where luna comes in – luna is the only digital health and wellbeing resource that's tailored to teenagers. Think of the app as an antidote to social media, resourcing teens in a way that suits them, and empowering them through trusted information.

What's in store for the future?

[Jas] We really are just getting started - the time is ripe for us, as teens more than ever need (and want) a safe, trusted and relatable digital alternative like luna.

The future for luna means being global, and in the pockets of teenagers across the world. It means serving both a younger demographic as we know girls as young as 8 are getting their periods, and potentially late teens too as we see more 18 and 19 year olds using luna. We also see a huge opportunity to support teen parents and would love to do more to support this audience too - in short there are a host of new opportunities and are super excited about the impact we will have over the next few years.

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

[Jo] Remember to take time to reflect on what you have achieved - it's easy to get caught up in the day to day and forget the progress you have been making, so definitely take a moment to remember why you started and what you've achieved so far! Jas and I set 30 mins aside weekly where we go through the highlights (and sometimes low lights of our week) - it's really amazing to see how far we've come when we look back to the first week we had this meeting!

[Jas] Try not to plan your life and big events (e.g., weddings, kids, house moves) around your startup. You can have the most perfect plan and ideal dates about when you'll fundraise, launch x, hire Y and then align your personal plans to the business, but the reality is that almost all plans shift - so try not to let the startup lead you. Do what's right for you and your family and put a plan in place to make it work for the business - this is where I feel so lucky to have such an amazing Co-Founder and team - they are incredible.

And finally, a more personal question! What's

your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

[Jo] Exercising is a non-negotiable for me - I need to do it for my mind as well as my body, so scheduling exercise into my week is important for me!

[Jas] Exercise is a huge one for me too, but I've also really started to be more intentional with what I do in the evenings - I am definitely a yes kind of girl and often found myself at events where I sometimes questioned how much I was enjoying myself. I'm really trying to put boundaries in place so I have enough time for myself, friends and of course my husband.

Jo Goodall & Jas Schembri-Stothart are the cofounders of [*luna*](#).

Article by Jo Goodall & Jas Schembri-Stothart