

Sex. Period.

These entrepreneurs hope to change the way we talk about sex and menstruation.

BY CHARIS TORRANCE

PLEASE

MIRA LEIBOWITZ AND GREG SHER

It's been a few months since Mira Leibowitz and Greg Sher launched Please, and they've since found a growing community of singles and couples who are looking for a fresh and inviting space to shop for intimate products.

How did Please come about?

Mira: For years, I've wanted to open a sex store. I stumbled on an Instagram account for the Italian sex store Wovo and I just loved everything about it. It made this kind of space seem fun, normal and exciting. It inspired me to want to open something similar.

Greg: We were both between jobs, and I was seeing a business and life coach because I wasn't really sure where to go from there. The more I discussed it, the more it seemed like the perfect time to act on Mira's dream of opening a sex shop.

What's the concept behind the business?

Mira: Please is an online space where people can explore intimate products and feel excited while doing so. We wanted to play with the idea of it being more suggestive than literal, because sex doesn't have to be so in your face; it can be subtle and still be sexy. We wanted to create an inviting platform where people aren't overwhelmed

START-UP COSTS: 'Initially these were high, and went mainly into the beautiful branding from Jana + Koos, the website and the stock. But it has since normalised and we can manage our costs far better.'

CURRENT TURNOVER: 'Our turnover is still small given we are a small new business, but it's increasing month on month. Once we get the right marketing mix we hope to really expand.'

or intimidated by what they see. We also have our own Please range, which includes massage oil, lube, toy cleaner and scented candles – all of it made in Cape Town.

Greg: For us, it strikes a balance between being a space where people can have a giggle while educating themselves, but also they don't feel like they need to cover their screens.

Do you ensure discretion when shipping products?

Greg: After careful consideration we decided to leave it up to the customer. On checkout, you have the option to choose a Please-design box or a plain brown box with no branding. This will still go in a courier satchel and the sender's name is listed as TGVC Pty Ltd.





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What challenges have you faced?

Greg: Marketing is really hard. We've had a few Instagram and Facebook posts restricted.

We just don't have enough data at the moment to know what works and what will get taken down and banned, so we rely a lot on in-person events and collaborations.

What advice would you give to a first-time shopper looking for a toy?

Mira: This question played a big part in what we're trying to create with Please. We want people not to feel intimidated. On the site, you'll find a questionnaire that you can fill in and we'll give you our top three picks for you, and we have blog posts where we talk about how to shop for your first toy, among other topics. You can also drop us an email and we'll be happy to answer any questions you have. But what it comes down to is asking yourself what excites you.

What's next for Please?

Greg: We have more collaborations in the works. And you can find us at The Sex Expo in Cape Town from 9 to 11 June and in Johannesburg from 27 to 29 October.

Mira: We've just launched a range of leather products under the Please label. It's not your typical all-black leatherwear (though you'll find that too); we also have more playful options. And one day we'd love to open a bricks-and-mortar retail space.

Website: pleasesex.com
Instagram: @_please_x_



**SHEBA
 FEMININE**
 ZIZIPHO NTOBONGWANA

Period. Period. Period. It's 2023 and people still get uncomfortable when confronted with the word. Zizipho Ntobongwana, founder and director of Sheba Feminine, is on a mission to change the way South Africa talks about sex and

menstruation. With her range of biodegradable and organic menstrual products, she caters for customers who value ethical consumerism.

Did you grow up in a family that was open about sex?

I grew up in a typical family from the Eastern Cape, where there was no conversation about sex.



START-UP COSTS: 'We launched Sheba with an initial investment of about R200 000, primarily for product research, development and branding. The feminine health sector involves significant costs, and it took us almost two years to get the product and branding just right.'

TURNOVER: 'We're a passionate start-up, challenging big brands in an industry dominated by multinational corporations. Our reach expands daily, and we're here to stay. Who knows, you may find us in your favourite stores soon.'

I also went to boarding school in KZN from Grade 5, which created distance between my parents and me. I was taught that sex was private and therefore not to be

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Most major brands don't want us to know what's in the menstrual products we are using.

talked about. Even the word 'vagina' was taboo – we had to call it a 'butterfly'. This silence made me feel uncomfortable asking questions about sexual health. I never imagined uttering the word 'vagina' around my parents. When I was in high school, I had to go on antibiotics and ended up getting a yeast infection.

I didn't even know what was happening; I had to Google it and used yoghurt as a home remedy because I had no one to ask. Now, I consider any STI or fungal infection much like the flu – it's just closer to my genitals. And I absolutely love saying the word vagina!

What inspired you to start Sheba Feminine?

My journey started when I picked up a box of tampons while sitting on the toilet one day and realised that there was no ingredient list on the packaging. I wondered why it was like that and then started

researching feminine hygiene products. I learnt that most major brands don't want us to know what's in the menstrual products we are using. I asked myself why we weren't using organic and biodegradable products, and why these products weren't being transparent by listing their ingredients. This inspired me to create something different, which ultimately led to the birth of Sheba Feminine. I wanted to revolutionise the way people experience menstruation and menstruate. I spent a year-and-a-half doing research, learning everything from how barcodes were made to the history of feminine products and the men behind the companies producing them.

Tell us about the range.

I initially started with pads, because most people in South Africa use them, but I quickly moved to include tampons and then I added panty liners, menstrual cups, ultra-soft biodegradable bamboo wet wipes, and travel wipes to the range.

Transparency and sustainability are important to us as a brand, so we made sure that our products were organic and biodegradable, the ingredients were listed, and that the packaging was not single-use but made of recycled cardboard. We are certified with the global organic textile standard and FDA-certified, ensuring that our products are made with 95 to 100% organic cotton fibres and contain no harsh chemicals. At Sheba, we're making it possible to finally have a leak- and stress-free period with high-quality products.

FIRE SAFETY TOP CAUSE OF INSURANCE CLAIMS

Winter has brought the cold, and many of us are heating our homes and offices to stay cosy. Coupled with lit candles and potentially faulty wiring or appliances, this significantly increases the risk of sparking a fire.

Needless to say, fire-related property insurance claims rise sharply during the cold winter months. Given this high risk, it's important to check your insurance policy to ensure you are adequately covered.

▶ FIRE INSURANCE IS ESSENTIAL

Covering the cost of fire damage without insurance can be financially devastating for anyone. Flames, smoke and the water used to extinguish a fire can severely damage buildings and belongings. If you are not adequately insured, it may not be possible to rebuild or repair damages.

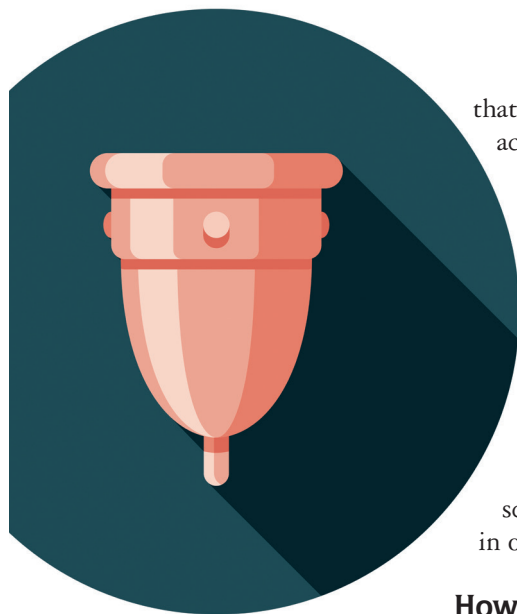
▶ PREVENTION FIRST

The adage 'prevention is better than cure' most definitely applies when it comes to fire safety. It's vital to take all the necessary precautions to prevent fires from breaking out. So, what can you do to reduce fire risks?

- Have at least one fire extinguisher in your home/office, and make sure it is in good working order.
- Never compromise on electrical or gas installations; make sure you obtain a compliance certificate and service as necessary.
- Ensure generators are properly installed and comply with all safety regulations.
- Conduct maintenance or replace old faulty electrical wiring and plug points.
- Install and maintain smoke detectors to help with early detection.
- Avoid build-up of materials that can act as fuel for a fire such as cardboard boxes, papers and plastic containers waiting to be recycled. Do not store recycling near flammable materials. Make sure you've taken all the necessary precautions so you can sleep easy knowing you are prepared for any eventuality.

For more information, contact your intermediary or visit www.santam.co.za

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Do you plan to expand your product line?

We're looking at incorporating a lot more sexual healthcare products, because I think the two go hand in hand. So we have things in the pipeline, but I don't want to give too much away. But what I can say to our community is that we're listening and we're looking to give people what they want.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the feminine hygiene industry?

Accessibility is a huge problem. In South Africa, 30% of girls miss school because they have limited or no access to menstrual products. This hinders their basic human rights and their menstruation rights – which is the right to menstrual health education, hygienic toilet facilities and menstrual care products. Which is why we launched our Pay for a Pal's Pads programme. We aim to ensure

that young girls in schools have access to period products that are comfortable, make them feel confident, and are safe for them to use. Through the programme, customers can provide a school child with subsidised Sheba Feminine menstrual products. We then donate these pads to schools and organisations in our programme.

How can we address the culture surrounding reproductive healthcare, and what role do you think Sheba Feminine can play in this?

The culture surrounding reproductive healthcare needs to be destigmatised, and we need to shift our ideas about menstruation to make them more realistic. We need to have conversations with parents, teachers and boys about menstruation and reproductive healthcare. It should not just be on girls to educate themselves, because most of the time they aren't the ones perpetuating the stigmas.

We host workshops around the country on menstrual and reproductive healthcare and menstrual care products, as well as taking care of your body during your period. We find that even today there is still a lot of shame surrounding periods. ❖

Website: shebafeminine.co.za
Instagram: [@shebafeminine](https://www.instagram.com/shebafeminine)

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