



How Maude CEO Éva Goicochea Plans to Revolutionize Sexual Wellness

Growing up in New Mexico, she read books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and understood the importance of destigmatizing sexuality. Now the entrepreneur shares how her modern sexual wellness company is reimagining an outdated industry.

Alicia Menendez:

If you have ever strolled down a family-planning aisle or blushed as you took some of those products off the shelf, then you know what Éva Goicochea knows. The sexual wellness industry is outdated. And, if we're being honest, not very sexy. It's part of what inspired Éva to launch Maude, a modern sexual wellness brand created to simplify sex.

You were born in New Mexico, sixth generation new Mexican, raised in California and in Michigan. What were the messages about sex and sexual wellness that you grew up with?

Éva Goicochea: I think growing up in New Mexico, I always liken it to almost being in *Portlandia*, but in Albuquerque. My mom was an arts educator and she surrounded herself with really sort of liberal, well-read human beings who talked about this stuff in a really factual and biological sort of way. So I remember my first copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. It was never a topic that was stigmatized in my household, but it was treated like a very biological human thing.

Menendez: And when did you realize that it was more than biology?

Goicochea: I think I realized that it was more than biology when I went to high school and I was at a Catholic high school, which, you know, my parents weren't very religious, but they wanted me to go to this school, which was really great. My family's Catholic in general, but I remember thinking there's a lot of taboo around sex that I had never experienced before, because it was normal in my family to ask questions or talk about these things. So I remember my friends telling me about their sex lives and me being really horrified because I had never heard it talked about in such a, such a shameful way, maybe, or like the secretive way. So, I learned about sex more when I was in high school, but it wasn't helpful so that's when I realized it was not just sex.

Menendez: Now, for someone who runs the type of company that you run, I would imagine that you are the girlfriend that people talk with about sex. Is that the case?

Goicochea: No, not at all. I am. I'm not the girlfriend that they talk to about sex, which is actually why I started the company in some ways, because my feeling was, you know, I'm 38, I'll be 39. I've been married for over a decade. I'm a pretty private person. And I actually believed the market is not serving what is an audience over 25. And sure we all have friends who we talked to about sex, but I wasn't the first person they'd go to. Um, because I'm so private, so it's not like it's going to be a reciprocal conversation where I talk about my sex life. I just

don't, interestingly enough. But I think that's really what makes Maude resonate with people is that it's pretty thoughtful.

Menendez: I think there's also a bias against married people where people assume you're not having sex.

Goicochea: I mean, when you're a startup founder, you know.

Menendez: That's a different issue.

Goicochea: Yeah, you're like, I'm busy, I'm tired. No, I think that's true, but I think, especially as you get older, if you have friends who are single and navigating dating in their thirties and you're married, like they don't want to talk to you about this stuff.

Menendez: When was the first time that you started to imagine the possibility that you were an entrepreneur?

Goicochea: When I was little, I mean, this is how I was when I was a little kid, like I've always been entrepreneurial. I started working when I was 14, so I wanted to go and learn and make my own money and feel independent. And it was all of these things that I think many people who are entrepreneurs sort of have in them to say, I'm going to go do this. Obviously, there's so much else to it beyond just having the gumption. It wasn't fully planned, but from the time I was very small, I always knew that I wanted to maybe run my own business.

Menendez: I love that. I love that.

Goicochea: I met some designers and we wanted to work on this project together, which was Tinker Watches. It just started unfolding. And then a conversation around sexual wellness happened saying like, why isn't this industry changed? And that's when I did this deep dive into the space and was like, wait a second, let's go back to *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Why is it that we're in now, you know, 2015. And I still feel like we haven't made any progress around this conversation. And then who owns the market and why are we being told that this is what sex should look like by those people? And that was it. I was like, this is what I'm supposed to do because I take what I learned sort of around the healthcare space and access, and how we feel about ourselves because of that access. And then, and when I say access, I don't mean being able to buy it off the shelf. I literally mean like, what's the stigma? What's the, all of it? And that was it. I knew that this was what I wanted to do.

Menendez: So who is in charge right now of the sexual wellness industry?

Goicochea: Trojan in the U.S. owns 70% plus of the market. Obviously you have K-Y who owns a lubricant sort of synonymous with lubricant. And then on the device side you have a lot of players. I mean, that's an industry that even though we have devices, we don't even, I'm not like at the trade shows in Vegas or, or really interacting with them. And, and they're all fragmented. They're not speaking to one another necessarily.

Menendez: So what was the void then that you saw?

Goicochea: I just thought, how is it possible design has led how we think about personal care or, you know, everyday objects in our home or all of these pieces of our lives. And it's not how sexual wellness has been approached. And this is a category that has so much implication

around how you feel about yourself and your partner psychologically, physically, mentally, it's really an important part of your life. And this is what we're getting?

Menendez: Because it feels what, like tacky, ugly? What was sort of your visceral feel about it?

Goicochea: Transactional, commoditized, misogynistic, all of it. And it's been that way for decades. So I just thought this is, this is the opposite of an inclusive industry. They're talking to college-aged boys. In the era that we're in, those boys don't even want to be spoken to that way.

Menendez: Right. So as I understand it, there are basically three years from when you begin conceptualizing this to when you launch Maude in 2018. What are you doing during those three years?

Goicochea: So the first year is 2015. It's just sort of this idea getting kicked around and it's with these other designers who started Tinker [Watches] with me. And then they're like, we don't really want to do this. We're not telling our grandmas that we make condoms. I mean, no one, everyone's like, no, we're not doing this. And I started asking my husband, Ian, for help, cause he's an engineer and he's in manufacturing. And so that was like 2015. 2016 we uproot our lives and move here. And basically in the in-between, I'm coming to New York and I'm doing like these entrepreneurial programs and I'm basically trying to build network. And then in 2016, we properly move here and I continue to do that. And then in 2017 I raised money. So, it was a long process.

Menendez: So, let's break down the promise of your brand: quality simplicity, inclusivity. How did you arrive at those three pillars and then how do you achieve each?

Goicochea: So, side note, I was building websites and helping people with their brands. So my initial instinct in 2015 was we're going to get this thing to market. Let's throw up a website. So we put the website up but we were like, wait a second. We're supposed to be gender inclusive and age inclusive. It kind of started unfolding. And it was like, wait, well, these colors aren't really those things. And maybe this is too young. So we went through many iterations of what it was going to be. And when I finally got here and I had really, you know, kicked off the company, truly like actually filed the paperwork to launch this thing, which was in 2017. That's when I revisited, what are our pillars? What do we stand for? What does ... and inclusivity was always the thing, it was the nugget. And then simplicity and quality, obviously you want quality but I think simplicity was letting design do the talking so that people could feel like they were, they were comfortable.

Menendez: Yeah. It definitely has a vibe. I want a wardrobe that is in all the colors of the Maude design pallet.

Goicochea: You know, before we launched, I built the brand book and made sure that we were ready.

Menendez: So once you raise your first few million, how do you go about spending it?

Goicochea: OK, the first raise was 500k and that went out the door in product. The next million and a half was used sort of in a very similar way, all through the process of what I've raised a lot of it has gone out the door in inventory but there is something around building a product company where you get stuck in this place where they're like, well, you don't have enough money in the bank to collateralize like a loan and you don't have enough inventory to collateralize it. And you're like, okay, but that's why I'm here. We're spending a lot of

money on inventory and raising money to try to keep up with that demand and that growth that we had set up in terms of how we thought the company should go. So, it's always been -- and this past year has probably been the worst of it, which is trying to keep up with demand and trying to just grow with not a ton of money.

Menendez: So given this push and pull that comes in a business like yours with inventory, what would it take to make that next jump?

Goicochea: Well, we're closing a series A so that's what it will take. I think it also is just now understanding what actual demand is and being able to model that out because the good news is that for the past year we've been out of product for 13 months, but we sort of modeled out the demand so that we could make bigger buying decisions. And that's what it will take. It'll take being just really like going for it and saying we gotta buy this inventory. We're gonna invest in marketing and we're going to move product. I'm a really conservative person when it comes to how we've spent our money.

Menendez: What is the biggest mistake you've made in launching Maude?

Goicochea: I think the biggest mistake I've made is probably listening to everybody at once. You know, you have investors. Yeah, everybody has an opinion. And I think you, there are times when you're a founder and I'm sure you can relate to this where you sometimes feel like you're in the dark trying to find a warm body. Like you're like anyone, please I have questions, I need help. And then you start to make decisions around who you surround yourself with what decisions you're making around spend or marketing or who your customer is. And it's a mistake I think, to let it all sort of fill you with, with ideas. I think you need to be really focused.

Menendez: 2020, you bring on Dakota Johnson, who a lot of people know and think of as an actress, most famously for *Fifty Shades of Grey*. And, she comes on as an investor and co-creative director with a focus on sustainability awareness, education-based initiatives. What went into the decision to bring on a partner?

Goicochea: I really thought about visibility. Could Dakota bring a new visibility to the conversation? Who is she as a person? The decision took like nine or 10 months from first conversation to signing paperwork. I think that she very much gets Maude and she has that right sensibility. I was in no way shape or form like starstruck and thinking that this was going to be a silver bullet to growth. I actually thought like, okay, Dakota will bring something to the table behind the scenes. And we will continue to, to map out what that looks like. And I think she has the right vision for that. So that's what made me decide to do it. I don't know that I would have done it with any other celebrity.

Menendez: What were the conversations that you're having? Because I think that there are a lot of people who will listen, you know, who aren't going to launch a business, right? It's not going to be that type of partnership. But you know, I think about Juleyka Lantigua Williams who co-owns Latina to Latina and who executive producers Latina to Latina, and we very much got thrown together. And then in one of those kismet moments was like, yes, this is a very good partnership. We had the luxury though of working together in a different premise before transitioning to being, you know, legitimate signature on the contract partners. And we had a lot of honest conversations about what our expectations were of one another, what the division of labor was going to be between the two of us. And I think also we've done a really good job of continuing to come back to that and checking in on

the relationship as you would, any type of personal relationship. What were the conversations you were having? What were the questions you were asking? What would your counsel be to someone else who in whatever it is they're pursuing is considering the possibility of bringing on a partner.

Goicochea: So I think there's actually two answers to this question because there's a difference between bringing on a celebrity who is not necessarily going to be like your co-founder, whose going to be championing the brand in other ways, versus bringing on a partner partner and a co-founder. Bringing on a celebrity and any of the advice I've given to other people is, it's not the fifties anymore. These are not people that are gonna hold up your butter and like make anything happen. I think, I think you have to like...

Menendez: I mean, those people are probably out there too ...

Goicochea: They're probably out there too. I mean, they're probably in the form of like Instagram influencers, more than celebrities, to be honest because I think we're all smarter consumers in this day and age. So, I would only do it with the idea that they were actually bringing something to the table beyond just their face. I mean, with Dakota, it was like, we do not want you to be the face of Maude. It's not a celebrity endorsement deal where you're going to go and hold up a pack of condoms and be on a billboard. This is going to be behind the scenes. You're going to learn about this business. And you're going to champion this business, whether that's through opening doors, whether that's through asking the right questions, whether it's through leading creative decisions. So that's what she does. And I would just say to somebody like, to your point, like have a job description, have an ask, have a clear division of labor and then figure out who the right person is for that. Do not bring on a celebrity or somebody because you think that they're going to change everything for you. That's not how it works.

Menendez: I can't get over the visual of someone holding up your butter.

Goicochea: I know ...

Menendez: Once you launch a company around sexual wellness, do the conversations around you start changing?

Goicochea: Me personally? No, no. I mean, I think the thing about Maude is it's like an extension of what my life is like, which is driven by design and driven by empathy and has a particular look and feel, and you could walk into my house and you'd be like, Oh, this is, yeah, the person who came up with Maude lives here, everything that I do is pretty consistent. So in that way, nobody even bats an eyelash. And I think that's what makes Maude really special, to be honest, because it gets integrated in conversation and maybe into your life personally, in the case of friends, you know, and they're like, now it's just so normal. I don't feel uncomfortable.

Menendez: I think the reason I'm a little knocked off my kilter by that attitude is that very often I perceive that when someone becomes a founder, especially like once they've raised initial amount of money, once they've gotten a certain amount of press, that there is an instinct to take on a persona that matches the brand. And I don't even know that it's always a bad thing or a nefarious thing. I just think it's part, you're walking into so many rooms and doing this big sell that I think those lines between yourself and the business can start to blow.

Goicochea: But I think if you looked at Maude or you look at how we write, or you look at the visuals, it's not too dissimilar from my own sensibility. It's not even that I have to create a persona. I haven't changed, I wear the same clothes. I go to the same, you know, like everything's the same and raising money is not sure, it changes some people for me, it doesn't change anything. It changes. Okay. Now we maybe have, you know, a few more employees or we have a longer lease or whatever the point is, it starts to scale in a different way, but it doesn't change who I am fundamentally. And Maude was built out of who I am and what my vision for it is. So I don't have to pretend, I guess.

Menendez: The mission of Maude isn't just to sell sexual wellness products and make a lot of money. At least that's not my sense of it. It is to change an outdated industry and make intimacy better. What does that then look like?

Goicochea: I think it becomes, if the way that you and I are talking about this category, if that becomes a new norm, that's what I'm looking for. I want this to have a trickle down effect to how people are educated, what conversations are happening at the dinner table, how design can be imparted and considered when you're talking about this category, how we treat ourselves and our bodies, all of it. I would not sell Maude, if there was a possibility that Maude will die. Like I will, I will die before Maude dies. It's kind of my ... because I really just fundamentally believe that this industry needs to change. I mean, I could sort of go on my soap box about why the ...

Menendez: Go on your soapbox! If not now, when?

Goicochea: Well, I was going to say, I think if you look at ... I wouldn't call it talk toxic masculinity, because I think there are multiple levels of, just any kind of toxic behavior out in the world. But if you really look at that in concept that stems from how we've talked about gender and sex and power from the time we were small and whatever we were seeing in the media and how things were being spoken about in our households. And then if you're in a Latina household, which mine was more progressive than most, there's a lot of machismo happening. Maude may be amongst many brands, but I think it's, it could change a lot of things if we can sort of really democratize and give voice to the fact that this is a human thing.

Menendez: I'm going to be in my shower using my bath wash, thinking about how I'm single-handedly democratizing a power. I mean, if there is a sale, that is it.

Goicochea: Yeah. I mean I think it's just, well, if it's anything it's going to be the vibrator, right? Because this idea that we have customers who say my husband and I are both okay with this, or like he bought it for me. Or if it's, if you're non-binary and you feel like we speak to you, or if you're in your sixties, which we have people who are in their sixties and seventies and eighties coming to Maude and saying, this is my first device I've ever used. We're all underserved. There are a lot of people that are in the underserved category of sexual wellness. And this industry has not spoken to us.

Menendez: What's next?

Goicochea: The series A, which came together really quickly. I've been really lucky with the investors that I've had, who believe in Maude. They don't push us to be anything that we're not, and they trust us. And that's what this round also looks like. And I don't know that I want to raise more money after this. This is really just about fueling what we couldn't keep up with.

And then it's continuing to just grow as much as we can and change. And if one day we are in the history books for being the next chapter, that's good. That's great.

Menendez: What did I miss?

Goicochea: I don't know. You're good at this. You ask a lot of good questions.

Menendez: Éva, thank you so much for doing this.

Goicochea: Thank you so much. It was good to talk to you.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our senior producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, keep sliding into our DMs on Instagram, and tweet at us @LatinaToLatina. Remember to subscribe and follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now, and know that every time you share the podcast or leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "How Maude CEO Éva Goicochea Plans to Revolutionize Sexual Wellness." *Latina to Latina*, Lantigua Williams & Co., July 5, 2021. LatinatoLatina.com

Produced by:

