



SEX & LOVE

✦ EXPERT ADVICE FOR BETTER RELATIONSHIPS AND BOLDER SEX ✦

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Stereophonics frontman Kelly Jones faces our questions



A VERY modern SEX TOY

Ever wondered how your pink silicone Rabbit became so Rampant? We delve into the development of the next big dildo





I've become quite adept at clenching dildos to keep them from slipping out of my vagina while I scribble down notes." Not a line from an EL James novel, but an example of the multitasking skills of Epiphora*, a sex blogger who enjoys a sideline in adult toy testing. She's one of hundreds of people regularly called upon by sex-toy companies to help them develop the next Rabbit. "My vagina's seen a lot of things – I've got more than 500 toys in my current collection."

Epiphora's efforts count for just one stage in the creation of your average sex toy. It's a process that demands a myriad of experts – designers, engineers and even gynaecologists. And given that the value of the global sex toy industry comes in at £3.8billion (according to Paul Jaques, operations manager for online sex-toy store Lovehoney, "Sales are set to match that of smartphones by 2020") it's about time we understood the making of our sex toys, from drawing board to bedroom...

1. Plugging a hole

Why, if existing dildos are doing such a good job at getting us off, do we need more? "As women become comfortable with using toys, the technologies and materials develop, too," says Jaques. "We have hundreds of toys in development at any one time and they can take up to two years from conception to going on sale."

The company holds regular 'gap analysis' meetings, where boardroom walls are plastered with Polaroids of their current toy range to identify what's missing. "We also look to other industries for new ideas," Jaques says. "You'd be surprised how many of our toys have been inspired by a power tool or communications device."

US company We-Vibe turns to consumer research for inspiration. "It can take up to 15 months to get an up-to-date, detailed analysis of what customers want next," says product marketing specialist Tristan Weedmark.

"A deep rumble is better than a speedy buzz"

2. It's in the detail

Once companies have decided on the main functions of their new toys, engineers and designers are set to task. Initial 2D renders are created and decisions are made on size and texture. "It can be as simple as a sketch on a piece of paper, but it's a starting point to bring the research to life," Jaques says.

Other considerations also come into play: where will the battery go? What size motor will work best? "The inner workings may well affect the external look," he adds. "It's best to know these details at the start, then we've got a pilot design to play with."



3. The ins and outs

Time to meet Jessie, a 3D animation created by We-Vibe, who's seen more action than the cast of *Geordie Shore* combined. "It's key at this stage to know that the toy hits the spot, so we created Jessie, an amalgamation of about 400 female body types that incorporates all their internal systems," Weedmark says. "We position a digital design inside her body on-screen to check how it sits in relation to the androgynous zones."

Next, the process gets physical. "We have a gynaecological model, similar to those used by medical students, which provides another level of guarantee that the product's fitting perfectly."

4. Quality control

Prototypes are then put through their paces. If a product is going to be marketed as waterproof, easy to clean and lube-friendly, the claims need to be kosher. A team checks the toy holds up.

The power is also put to the test. "Vibration is critical to success, so it's vital to get the motor function absolutely right," Weedmark adds. "Speed doesn't always translate to power – our customers prefer a deep, rumbling pulse rather than a speedy surface-level buzz."

5. Testing in context

Now comes Epiphora's big 'O' moment. Once a prototype has been triple-checked, a small batch is produced, ready for human assessment.

"Our first round of testing targets experts – sex therapists, gynaecologists, sex researchers," Weedmark says. "They're so well-versed in the female anatomy and give us very specific notes on their experience."

Epiphora takes her role incredibly seriously: "I test each toy multiple times, using all the different settings. I write everything down, from how noisy it is to what sensations the texture arouses."

Lovehoney prefers to keep its testers closer to home. "We have an in-house team, which helps keep our wackier ideas under wraps and means no question is off-limits," Jaques explains.

Once the insiders have had their say, the toys go public. Anywhere from 20 to 200 average Janes can be called on to test a single toy's mettle. "We ask that each person uses the toy three times before filling out a questionnaire, covering everything from how it fits internally to which setting is most likely to make them orgasm," Weedmark says.



6. The final touch

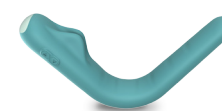
The look of a product can be just as critical to its success as its climax-causing credentials. "Sure, the toy has to be fit for purpose, but if its design doesn't appeal to customers, they won't give it a chance," Weedmark says.

Companies are moving away from phallic-shaped products because they're considered intimidating, especially by men who see them as 'competition' and can actually lose their libido as a result.

"We're investing heavily in the design of toys to make everything more sleek, chic and streamlined," Weedmark adds. "We want toys to feel like an everyday purchase rather than something salacious or taboo." **WH**

SOME LIKE IT HOTTER

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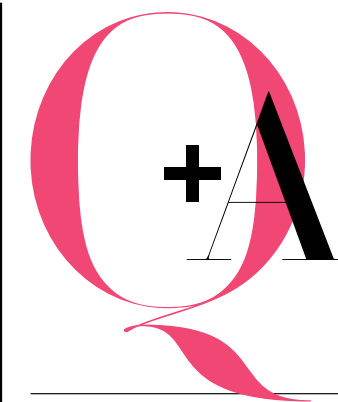
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Ask the expert

The expert:

Zita West

Who: Sex and fertility expert, and director of Zita West Clinic



Q Can sex during IVF affect our success?

A This is a tricky one, as the impact of sex during IVF is not yet fully known. Some experts worry that orgasm could interfere with the implantation of an embryo. While there's no concrete evidence, I would always err on the side of caution and take it easy during key stages of treatment. But the best thing is to flag your partner's concerns to your doctor or consultant and follow their advice. The other thing to bear in mind is that you may well not feel like having sex while going through IVF. Many women find the drugs they're given can dull their sex drive and after certain procedures, your body may feel tender. It's just as important to listen to your body as it is to seek personalised expert advice.

Q Are there any exercises I can do to boost fertility?

A While there isn't really a specific exercise that'll up your chances of conceiving, working out is good for fertility. It encourages your body to release beta-endorphins, which help to deal with stress hormones that can have a negative impact on ovulation. Plus, workouts help boost the flow of oxygen-rich blood around the body, including to your pelvic area (no bad thing for egg health). But a word of warning: extreme exercise – especially if it results in low body weight – can upset your hormonal balance and disrupt ovulation. So lay off the double marathons for now...