

Activewear Reign: The Rise of Petals Lagos

By Oroma Jumbo

If you've been observant, you've likely encountered this particular brand at your local gym or on various social media platforms. I can attest to noticing it quite frequently. It's rare for me to visit the gym or scroll through Instagram without spotting three to five women proudly showcasing their fashionable Petals Lagos activewear.

Allow me to introduce Vanessa Ochi, the visionary behind this rapidly expanding activewear brand. In 2021, she identified a gap in the market and took the initiative to establish Petals Lagos. Since then, it has blossomed into a nationwide sensation, relied upon by many individuals seeking trendy and convenient fitness attire solutions.

Initially focusing on activewear, Vanessa has also ventured into sports accessories, offering items such as protein shakers, water bottles, and workout mats. Furthermore, she has expanded the clothing range to include bodysuits and underwear. With a multitude of ideas brewing in her mind, Vanessa aspires to propel Petals Lagos into an internationally recognised brand.

I'm sure that numerous people, myself included, are curious about the face and brains behind Petals Lagos, one of Lagos's leading activewear brands for women. Tell us more about yourself. Who is Vanessa Ochi?

My name is Ochi Amarachi Vanessa, and I was born and raised in Lagos. I am the founder and creative force behind Petals Lagos, a prominent performance apparel brand for women in Lagos. I have always had a strong interest in fashion and design. I recognised the need for stylish and functional activewear options for women in Lagos, and this motivated me to start the brand in 2021. I noticed the common types of gym wear available here then were either thrifted or on preorder, i.e., you'd have to order from the UK or USA and wait for about two weeks to receive, which was a no-no for me.

My vision for Petals Lagos is to create clothing that not only looks good but also performs well during physical activities. I believe that when we feel comfortable and confident in our workout attire, we are more likely to achieve our fitness goals. I believe so much in feeling and looking good. I carefully handpick each piece, ensuring they are made with high-quality fabric and incorporating cutting-edge features that cater to the needs of active women.

Beyond creating stylish sportswear, I am also passionate about promoting body positivity and inclusivity.

Can you share the story behind the inception of Petals Lagos? Did the brand originate from a business-oriented mindset, or was it a combination of *lifestyle* and business that drove your motivation to start it?

Petals Lagos was founded on 30 September 2021 to fill a gap in the Nigerian market for stylish and high-quality activewear for women. I dislike buying secondhand items because I often struggle to find variety, and everything seems similar. Ordering items from the UK or America takes too much time, and the increasing exchange rate is discouraging.

As a business enthusiast with an entrepreneurial mindset, I saw a business opportunity in the market. I could combine my passion for fitness and style with a business-oriented approach, leading to the inception of PL.

Lastly, I desired to empower women to look and feel their best. I am so glad we have been able to do that so far. We get many reviews from women nationwide thanking us for making them look good and feel confident in their skin. The feelings we get when seeing reviews like that are unmatched.

How did you come about the name “Petals Lagos”?

What's the day-to-day of running the business like?

Running Petals Lagos on a day-to-day basis is both exhilarating and demanding. Each day brings its unique set of challenges and opportunities. Here's an overview of what my daily routine typically involves:

- **Design and Creativity:** I start my day by immersing myself in the world of design and creativity. This includes brainstorming new ideas for athletic clothing collections, sketching designs, and collaborating with our creative team to bring these concepts to life. Ensuring our designs are fresh and unique is a top priority.
- **Production and Quality Control:** I oversee the production process closely, working with our manufacturing partners to maintain the high standards of quality that Petals Lagos is known for. Quality control checks are performed to ensure every garment meets our precise standards.
- **Business Operations:** Managing the day-to-day operations of the business is crucial. This involves coordinating inventory, monitoring sales and financial metrics, and ensuring our supply chain runs smoothly. I also handle administrative tasks, such as responding to emails and handling customer inquiries sometimes.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Promoting the brand is a constant effort. I work on marketing strategies, social media campaigns, and collaborations to keep Petals Lagos in the public eye. Engaging with our audience through social media and other platforms is a priority.

- **Customer Engagement:** Building and maintaining strong relationships with our customers is essential. I take time to engage with customers, gather feedback, and address any concerns or inquiries. This helps in building trust and loyalty.
- **Networking and Industry Involvement:** Staying connected with others in the fashion and fitness industry is essential.
- **Innovation and Research:** Continuous improvement is vital. I allocate time to research emerging trends in the fitness wear industry, seek inspiration from different sources, and explore sustainable practices to incorporate into our brand.
- **Team Management:** As the owner, I lead and manage our dedicated team, ensuring everyone is aligned with our brand's vision and goals. This involves regular meetings, performance evaluations, and fostering a creative and collaborative work environment.
- **Strategic Planning:** I dedicate time to long-term planning and strategy development. This includes setting goals, exploring expansion opportunities, and considering new markets.
- **Self-Care:** Running a business can be intense, so I make it a point to prioritise self-care. This might involve exercising, meditation, or taking breaks to recharge my creativity and energy.

In essence, running Petals Lagos is a multi-faceted journey that requires dedication, creativity, and a constant drive for improvement. It's a rewarding endeavour fueled by the passion for providing unique and high-quality activewear to our customers in Lagos and beyond.

In your view, what sets Petals Lagos apart and makes it a preferred choice for fitness enthusiasts in Lagos?

Petals Lagos stands out and remains the preferred choice for fitness enthusiasts in Nigeria due to our unwavering commitment to uniqueness and quality. We take pride in our ability to bring distinctive, trend-setting designs to the sportswear market that look good and make people feel great. Our brand has become synonymous with originality and style.

Moreover, the origin story of Petals Lagos adds to its allure. This authentic connection resonates with our customers, making them feel a sense of pride in wearing our products. Ultimately, our dedication to crafting exceptional, comfortable, and performance-driven gear ensures that fitness enthusiasts in Nigeria choose Petals Lagos as their go-to brand. We believe that looking and feeling good during workouts is a vital part of one's fitness journey, and that's precisely what we offer.

How do you stay updated with the latest trends and preferences in the fitness wear and accessories industry?

Staying current with the latest trends and preferences in the fitness wear and accessories industry is paramount for Petals Lagos. Here's how I ensure we remain on the cutting edge:

- **Market Research:** I consistently research to understand shifting consumer preferences, emerging design trends, and the competitive landscape. This involves studying market reports, competitor offerings, and consumer feedback.
- **Fashion and Fitness Publications:** I regularly read fashion and fitness magazines and listen to podcasts to gain insights into evolving styles and preferences. This keeps me informed about what's hot and what's fading in the industry.
- **Networking:** Building a strong network in the industry is invaluable. I connect with fellow designers and discuss with fitness enthusiasts to gather firsthand insights and opinions.
- **Social Media Monitoring:** Social media platforms are treasure troves of trends. I closely monitor fitness and fashion influencers and hashtags related to athletic clothing to spot emerging styles and customer preferences.
- **Customer Feedback:** Our customers are a vital source of information. We actively seek their feedback through surveys, reviews, and direct communication. Their insights often lead to product improvements and new design ideas.
- **Sustainability and Technology:** I also keep a keen eye on the growing trends in sustainable activewear and the integration of technology, such as smart fabrics and wearables, into fitness apparel.

By combining these strategies, Petals Lagos remains agile and responsive to the ever-evolving preferences and trends in the fitness wear and accessories industry. This allows us to continue offering our customers stylish workout attires that align with their needs and desires.

The activewear market in Nigeria is continuously growing, but you were able to distinguish your brand and achieve success with it. What advice do you have for staying relevant in a saturated market?

Staying relevant is a challenge but also an opportunity for growth. Here are some insights and advice based on my experience:

- **Unique Brand Identity:** Differentiate your brand by creating a unique identity. Develop a strong brand story that resonates with your target audience and showcases what differentiates your product.
- **Quality First:** Prioritize the quality of your products. Consistently delivering high-quality products builds trust with customers and encourages repeat business.
- **Continuous Innovation:** Stay ahead of the curve by advancing in design, materials, and functionality. Be open to experimentation and embrace new trends while staying true to your brand's core values.
- **Customer-Centric Approach:** Listen to your customers. Their feedback is invaluable for understanding their needs and preferences. Adapt your offerings based on their input to ensure you're meeting their expectations.
- **Effective Marketing:** Develop a robust marketing strategy that includes a strong online presence, engaging content, and partnerships with fitness influencers. Social media platforms are powerful tools for reaching your target audience.

- **Quality Control:** Maintain strict quality control processes to ensure every product meets your brand's standards. Consistency in quality is essential for building a solid reputation.
- **Sustainability:** Consider incorporating sustainable practices into your production process. Eco-friendly activewear is gaining popularity, and aligning with sustainability trends can attract environmentally conscious consumers.
- **Adaptability:** Be adaptable and responsive to market changes. The industry is dynamic, so staying flexible and open to adjustments is crucial for long-term success.
- **Competitive Pricing:** Offer competitive pricing without compromising quality. Finding the right balance between value and cost is critical to attracting price-conscious consumers.
- **Brand Authenticity:** Stay true to your brand's values and mission. Authenticity builds trust and credibility with customers, which is especially important in a competitive market.
- **Continuous Learning:** Stay informed about industry trends and best practices by attending workshops, seminars, and trade shows. Learning from others can provide fresh insights and ideas.

By following these, you can stay relevant in Nigeria's competitive activewear market and thrive and continue to grow your brand's presence and influence.

Could you tell us about a notable achievement or milestone for Petals Lagos that you're particularly proud of?

One of the most remarkable achievements for Petals Lagos that fills me with immense pride is reaching the milestone of our first 15,000 sales in less than two years of being in business. This reflects our customers' trust in our brand and the incredible growth we've experienced since our inception. Seeing our unique designs and commitment to quality resonate with fitness enthusiasts across Nigeria is gratifying. Additionally, becoming a household name and the go-to choice for exercise clothing in Nigeria is a testament to our team's dedication and customer loyalty. Seeing women nationwide proudly wear our pieces during their fitness journeys is a source of inspiration, and we're honoured to be the leading activewear brand in Nigeria. These achievements drive us to continue pushing boundaries and delivering excellence.

What are some of the challenges you've faced while doing business in Lagos? How have you overcome these challenges?

While rewarding, running a business in Nigeria has its fair share of challenges. Here are some of the key challenges I've encountered and the strategies I've employed to overcome them:

- **Infrastructure and Logistics:** Nigeria's infrastructure can be unreliable, affecting transportation and supply chain efficiency. To address this, we've established strong relationships with reliable logistics partners and built buffer times into our production schedules to account for potential delays.
- **Currency Fluctuations:** Nigeria faces currency fluctuations that affect import costs. We manage this by diversifying suppliers and using forward contracts to secure exchange rates. There is no foolproof solution to this, only careful management.
- **Power and Energy:** Frequent power outages can disrupt operations. We've invested in backup power solutions and energy-efficient equipment to mitigate the impact of these interruptions.
- **Market Competition:** The market is competitive, so we focus on selling unique designs and maintaining exceptional quality to set ourselves apart.
- **Talent Acquisition:** Finding skilled employees can be challenging. We've implemented comprehensive training programs to develop our team's skills and provide growth opportunities within the company.
- **Economic Uncertainty:** Nigeria's economy can be volatile. We've developed flexible financial strategies to adapt to changing economic conditions and minimise risks.
- **Customer Trust:** Building and maintaining trust in a market where consumer scepticism exists can be challenging. We prioritise transparent communication, reliable customer service, and consistent product quality to earn and keep our customers' trust.
- **Market Sensitivity:** Nigerian consumer preferences can change rapidly. We stay attuned to customer feedback and market trends, allowing us to adapt our product offerings and marketing strategies accordingly.

Overcoming these challenges has required adaptability, resilience, and a deep understanding of the local business environment. By proactively addressing these issues and maintaining a customer-centric approach, we've been able to not only navigate the challenges but also continue to grow and thrive in the Nigerian market.

What aspects of being an entrepreneur bring you the most joy, and what inspires you to keep growing Petals Lagos?

Being an entrepreneur brings me immense joy in several ways:

- **Customer Satisfaction:** It is deeply rewarding to know that Petals Lagos plays a part in making our customers feel confident and comfortable on their fitness journeys. Their satisfaction and feedback motivate me every day.
- **Building a Community:** Building a strong and supportive community around our brand has been heartwarming.

- **Impact on Fitness:** Inspiring and empowering individuals to lead healthier lifestyles through our fitness wear is a driving force. Knowing that we contribute to the fitness and well-being of our customers is a source of pride.
- **Championing Nigerian Craftsmanship:** Promoting Nigerian craftsmanship in the fashion industry is a privilege. It's a joy to showcase creativity.
- **Overcoming Challenges:** Every challenge and obstacle we've faced has been an opportunity for growth. Overcoming these hurdles and achieving milestones brings a sense of accomplishment.

What inspires me to grow Petals Lagos is the belief in our brand's potential and the endless opportunities for expansion and positive impact. Nigeria's fashion and fitness landscape offers exciting possibilities, which I'm driven to explore. The support of our customers, the dedication of our team, and the desire to maintain our industry leadership inspire me daily. Petals Lagos is more than a brand; it's a passion, a community, and a commitment to excellence that pushes us to achieve more daily.

What is your vision for the future of Petals Lagos? Are there any exciting plans you'd like to share?

My vision for the future of Petals Lagos is both ambitious and exciting. I see Petals Lagos evolving into a globally recognised brand that transcends boundaries while maintaining its deep roots in Nigeria. Here are some key aspects of our future plans:

- We aim to expand our presence beyond Nigeria and make Petals Lagos an international sensation. This includes exploring markets in neighbouring African countries and eventually reaching a global audience.
- We plan to diversify our collections, offering a more comprehensive range of styles, sizes, and designs to cater to a more extensive customer base. Inclusivity and representation are top priorities in our offerings.
- Strengthening our community engagement efforts is crucial. We envision hosting fitness and wellness events, partnering with local fitness communities, and fostering a sense of belonging among our customers.
- Exciting collaborations with fashion designers and influencers are on the horizon. These partnerships will allow us to continually push the boundaries of design and style.
- We plan to expand our retail presence, including the possibility of flagship stores in key cities. This will provide customers with the opportunity for in-person shopping and a more immersive brand experience.
- We aspire to have Petals Lagos featured in major international fashion shows and publications, solidifying our reputation as a global leader in activewear.
- Above all, our commitment to delivering high-quality apparel that empowers and inspires our customers will remain unwavering.

The future of Petals Lagos is filled with exciting possibilities, and our dedication to quality and customer satisfaction will continue to drive us forward. We're poised to make an indelible mark

in the world of athletic clothing, and I'm thrilled to embark on this journey towards realising our vision.

When you're not busy with work, what activities do you enjoy for fun or to relax?

During leisure moments, I engage in various activities, including watching movies, delving into books, spending quality time with family, socialising with friends, and, of course, working out. These pursuits offer a welcome reprieve from work demands, allowing me to unwind and recharge.