



Adenike Ogunlesi is more than just a pretty face. She is an entrepreneur, trailblazer, role model and successful mentor. Starting her business from the boot of her car, it has taken passion, strong will and patience to own and run a business in Nigeria. Like she always says, “it is DOABLE.” Just get in there.

Proudly ‘Made in Nigeria’ - Adenike Ogunlesi is the founder of Ruff ‘n’ Tumble, a children’s clothing line in Nigeria. From a tiny shop staffed by her and her mother, Adenike (aka Nike) turned Ruff ‘n’ Tumble into an instantly recognizable brand. She has built a reputation for being one of the best manufacturers of children’s clothing in Nigeria.

In her second year as an undergraduate law student at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Adenike opted out of school unsure of what to do with her life. She then reluctantly accepted her mother’s invitation to work in her women’s tailor shop. Within one year, she said she discovered herself and that experience helped her to discover what she wanted to do. She is yet another university graduate that never practiced within her profession.

She started up making clothes for women and as time went by, in her own words, “My kids ran out of pajamas. So I decided that I’d just make some pajamas for my kids.” She then got orders from her friends and family, and her husband encouraged her to diversify to shorts, shirts, skirts, e.t.c. This is how Ruff ‘n’ Tumble started.

The challenges - As in most businesses however, the challenges of starting up were not to be ignored. She had no shop of her own, so she was selling from the back of her car at bazaars and other random places. “Wherever there was a bazaar, I was there, my table and my suit case, my children and sometimes even my husband.” But as business orders picked up, she hired more tailors, and realized she needed a retail outlet. She started off in a small kiosk, and by the third year, the shop was too small for the growing business. As she looked to expand, bank loans were not forthcoming, but with the business returns, she managed to get a bigger shop. Ruff ‘n’ tumble now has five branches countrywide. She recently opened two new outlets in Port Harcourt and Surulere, Lagos.

Her first advert featured her own children wearing her clothes. According to her, this was the most powerful and effective advertising campaign ever. People were quick to identify with a Nigerian face, wearing 'Made in Nigeria' outfits. This was not a clip from an international magazine, it was a homemade product. This became her advertising line to date.

The absence of a physical business address wasn't her only challenge. Unreliable electricity supply continues to dig a deeper hole into her profit margin because back-up generators wear out too quickly. There is of course the ban on importation of fabric, and like it is for any other business, corruption.

These challenges notwithstanding, Adenike has learned that success of any business relies heavily on staff loyalty. She manages to pay her staff well, treat them with decency, respect and empower them to be part of 'the dream'.

Limitless local market - Adenike says she has found a very insatiable market at home. "We don't export now. Export to the West African coast, but America or England, I'm not interested at all. If 40% of the 120 million people in Nigeria are children, I have the potential of a huge market here."

Adenike was featured in the Africa Open for Business Documentary and was recognized as the FATE Foundation Model Entrepreneur in 2005. She is also a mentor to the Junior Achievement of Nigeria and the Fate Foundation. Today, Ruff 'n' Tumble is the most popular children's clothing line in Nigeria. Adenike has grown her brand targeting young adults as well with the introduction of the NaijaBoysZ® and Trendsetters® brands last year.

