

RI BUSINESS

Rhode Island-based Roam Loud speaks volumes with its focus on Black women

Toyin Omisore's fitness apparel brand has quickly become a national player in the crowded activewear industry

By Jenna Pelletier Updated August 24, 2022, 6:00 a.m.



Toyin Omisore, right, owner and designer of Roam Loud clothing, talked with photographer Mayker Duran, left, during a recent photo shoot of some of the brand's outfits. In the spring of 2020, Omisore pivoted from an established career in social work to launch Roam Loud as a one-woman operation. MATTHEW HEALEY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

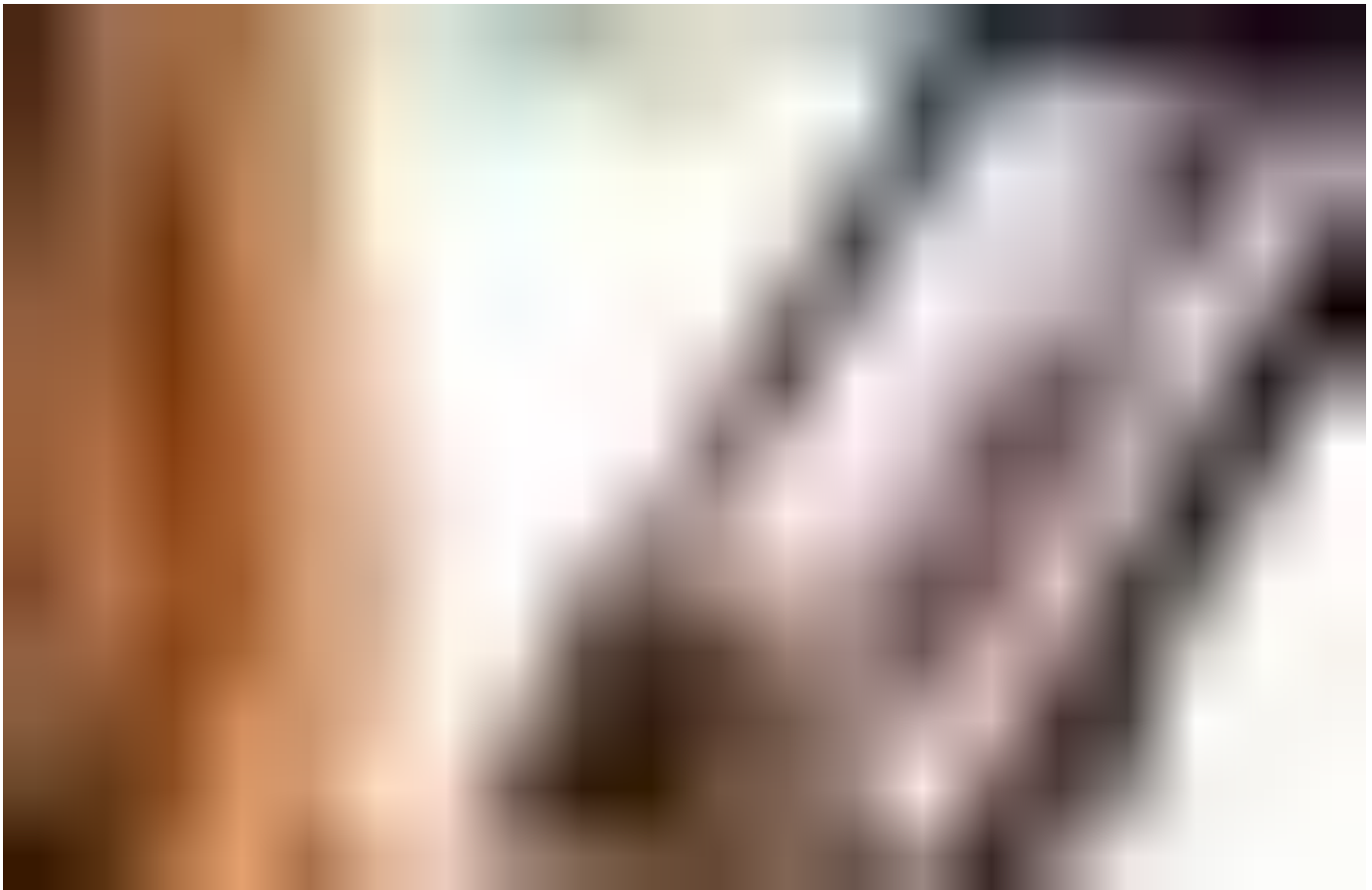
Growing up on the South Side of Providence, Toyin Omisore excelled in dance and acrobatics classes but didn't always feel comfortable in her performance costumes.

“I remember we all had to wear the same color stockings at recitals,” she says. “For me, it was always weird, and I was like, ‘Mom, this is not my skin tone.’”

Experiences like that motivated Omisore, 36, to create her Rhode Island-based activewear and athleisure clothing company, Roam Loud, “where I’m intentionally and unapologetically saying brown skin is at the forefront and not an afterthought.”

For Omisore, this ethos includes using Black models in her advertisements and social media posts, as well as choosing fabric colors that complement darker skin tones. Her brand also has a YouTube channel and blog with content geared toward BIPOC women.

“But Roam Loud is not meant to be for Black and brown women only,” says Omisore, whose mother and father met in Providence in the 1980s after moving to the U.S. from Liberia and Nigeria, respectively. “I’m just providing the platform for them to feel seen. The core is about encouraging all women to break out of societal norms and make our own rules.”



Toyin Omisore, left, owner and designer of Roam Loud, looks over images taken by photographer Mayker Duran (not pictured) during a photo shoot of a Roam Loud outfit worn by model Aminah Fonseca in Duran's studio in Providence, Rhode Island. MATTHEW HEALEY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Omisore's career trajectory aligns with her brand's motivational messaging. In the spring of 2020, she pivoted from an established career in social work to launch Roam Loud as a one-woman operation. She began by selling her designs directly to consumers through an online store.

Now, Roam Loud leggings, sports bras and jackets are available to purchase in Kohl's department store locations and CorePower Yoga studios throughout the country. And the brand has been featured in several national fashion and fitness publications.

How'd she do it? "That's the million-dollar question," says Omisore with a smile while sitting at her desk in an office building on Park Avenue in Cranston.

The office's bright orange walls are covered with posters of models confidently posing in Roam Loud sports bra and leggings sets. There's also a framed printout of the

company's brand manifesto, which she wrote after part of it came to her in a dream one night.

“Too often, we create boxes and limitations for ourselves that leave us unfulfilled,” part of it reads.

Several factors have led to the brand's relatively fast success, she says. Before starting Roam Loud, Omisore had spent about a decade working on other start-up businesses, including a vending machine company and a dating app. These were not ultimately successful but helped her learn skills related to marketing and web design. She also volunteered as event and reservations director for Providence-based Styleweek Northeast.

“I've been told in some important meetings that the forward-facing Roam Loud brand appears to be older than it is,” Omisore says. “So, I was able to be taken seriously in a short amount of time — but I also had to be able to deliver.”



This year, Roam Loud clothing hit the racks in 100 Kohl's locations throughout the country. The pieces include leggings and sports bras in vibrant hues. MAYKER DURAN

Omisore comes from a business-minded family, which has also helped. As she worked

on the concept for Roam Loud, she tapped into the community her sister, Kemi Asani, has created through her own fitness brand, Afrobeat Fit. The mobile company hosts cardio “sweat sessions” with African-inspired movement and music. Early on, Omisore hosted pop-up shops and solicited feedback at her sister’s classes throughout the East Coast.

Omisore creates the concepts and sketches for her athleticwear, and then works with manufacturers in China and Brazil to produce the clothing.

Another thing that has helped her succeed: When she launched her business at the beginning of the pandemic, she easily found an engaged audience online. “I spent a lot of time at home in online groups talking about my brand,” she says.

That summer, as social justice protests in the wake of George Floyd’s murder prompted a call to support Black-owned businesses, Roam Loud was tagged on many social media posts and articles, which increased online sales.

“We were absolutely swept into a lot of the conversations that were happening,” Omisore says. “And with more people shopping online at the time, it made it easier to find small businesses like mine.”

Before the end of 2020, a buyer for CorePower Yoga, the largest yoga studio chain in the country, sent Omisore an email asking if she’d like to talk. Now, her sports bras and leggings are sold on CorePower’s website and at nearly 80 of its studios, including three in the Boston area.

Caitlin Noble, retail buyer for CorePower Yoga, said Roam Loud’s inclusive brand messaging is just one part of its appeal.

“Toyin launched Roam Loud to celebrate individual passions and identities, which spoke to our mission of creating a supportive, inclusive community while supporting the long-term growth and success of BIPOC businesses,” Noble says.



Toyin Omisore, center, looks over images taken by photographer Mayker Duran, right, during a photo shoot of a Roam Loud outfit worn by model Aminah Fonseca, left. MATTHEW HEALEY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

This past January, Roam Loud apparel hit the racks in 100 Kohl's locations throughout the country. The pieces, which are also available on the retailer's website, include leggings and sports bras in vibrant pink and orange hues, as well as a neon green cropped jacket.

"As a new brand, having that stamp of approval from Kohl's is amazing," Omisore says. "Seeing it in stores was a little surreal. It was like an out-of-body experience."

Roam Loud designs have African-derived names, including the Niabo top and Ziama jacket. They are meant to honor Omisore's mother, Amanda, a nurse at the Department of Corrections, and her Liberian maternal grandmother, whom she never got to meet.

"The way my mom would describe my grandmother as a hard worker and an amazing mother inspired me," she says.

Omisore is looking to build on her success by working with other retailers. She's also creating a new collection and is developing more sizes, so her pieces fit all body types.

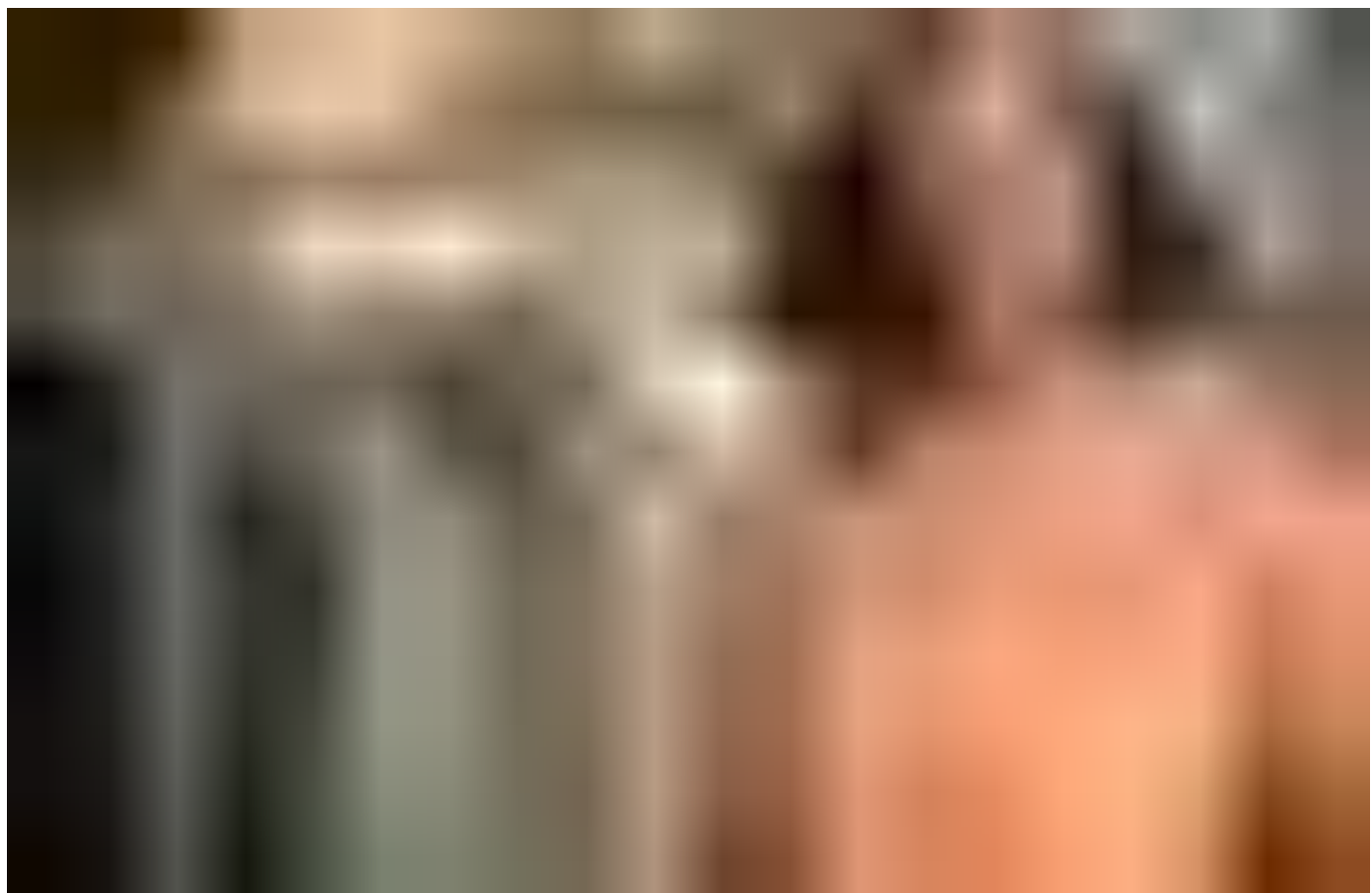
It has been rewarding, she says, to finally find success after spending years learning through trial and error.

"You have to wildly believe in yourself," Omisore says. "You're going to have terrible days, but you have to get up the next day and move forward."

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When she needs a lift, she looks at her own words in the manifesto hanging on her office wall: "We are called," it reads, "to move through the world on our own terms."

For more information, visit roamloud.com.



Toyin Omisore framed a printout of the company's brand manifesto, which she wrote after part of it came to her in a dream one night. "Too often, we create boxes and limitations for ourselves that leave us unfulfilled," part of it reads. MATTHEW HEALEY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE