

Five Brands Across Design and Tech in the African Diaspora

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When it comes to design across the African diaspora marketers, advertisers, fundraisers, and designers often misunderstand and underestimate the potential of this massive market. Some in the West hear “Africa” and suddenly the image of a suffering “country” that can only be saved by a wealthy White savior come to mind. Add the term “diaspora,” and now the conversation seems complicated.

However, this is not the case for everyone. Some brands have been able to break through stereotypes and build spaces in the digital marketplace to create vibrant online communities using smart design and market positioning to and from the African diaspora. Keep reading to check out these awesome brands!

OkayAfrica



Brooklyn-based [OkayAfrica](#) was founded in 2011 as the sister publication to OkayPlayer, a music and culture platform founded by Questlove of The Roots. Since that time, OkayAfrica has grown into a space for art, music, politics, and culture across the African diaspora, all while based in the US. They feature fashion photographers from Namibia, music reviews, and host live musical performances. OkayAfrica is also committed to breaking news as well. When rising Afro-Brazilian politician [Marielle Franco was assassinated](#), OkayAfrica partnered with teleSUR English (who used Facebook Live) [to capture thousands of mourners](#).

Nubian Skin

NUBIAN SKIN
... A DIFFERENT KIND OF NUDE

The concept of “nude” is an ongoing problem in the fashion industry. With the exception of Kanye West, few designers have dedicated their fashion lines to include multiple nudes. [Nubian Skin](#), headquartered in London, is the first full line of lingerie, hosiery, and shoes dedicated to nude colors for women of color. Nubian Skin’s founder Ade Hassan decided it was time to reorient the definition of nude.

For her, Nubian Skin was born out of frustration with not finding lingerie that blended seamlessly with her skin tone. It’s also important to value the design and functionality of nude undergarments, as they create a smoother silhouette for women. While [Christian Louboutin was heralded for selling various nude shoes once](#), Nubian Skin realized that one-off campaigns were not enough to sustain this market. Partnering with US and UK department stores [Nordstrom](#) and [House of Fraser](#), Nubian Skin was able to break into the US/UK markets, while maintaining its base relationship to the consumer.

Rich Mnisi



Emerging fashion designer Rich Mnisi is based out of South Africa and won Africa Fashion International's Young Designer of the Year award in 2014. His style can be described as deconstructed yet wearable; psychedelic, gender-bending, post-punk, and Afrofuturistic with a heavy use of vibrant colors that enhance dark brown skin tones.

Like many fashion brands, Mnisi uses social media platforms such as Instagram to reach larger audiences, like Vogue Italia. Just as designers Maison Martin Margiela and Balmain have partnered with fast-fashion retailer H&M, Mnisi partnered with South African-based retailer Woolworths to sustain his business. The content on his website defaults to Xhosa, one of seven main languages spoken in South Africa. It's a lesson for those of us who often orient our content to Western languages.

Social Media Week Lagos

Social Media Week was held for the first time in Lagos, Nigeria in 2013. The annual event was held previously in New York, L.A., London, Milan, and other cities in the U.S. and Europe. Ngozi Adita saw the viability of hosting SMW for the first time in an African nation. Unlike most conferences where speakers are selected and curated, outreach for SMW Lagos is more community-oriented. They host a week-long event of over 100 speakers, and last year's event attracted over 8,000 registrants.



Zuvaa

ZUVA A



Zuvaa is an Atlanta-based online clothing retailer that specializes in African-inspired clothing and accessories from over 85 brands worldwide. They are unique in the marketplace, in that they source items one cannot find in a traditional brick-and-mortar store while maintaining real-world customer relations. Zuvaa visits and hosts trunk shows in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Detroit. They were also recently featured on ABC's "Shark Tank"!

Some may assume that companies and brands from throughout the African diaspora are operating from a deficit, but that is an unnecessary argument to make. These brands exhibit a cultural awareness that people of the African diaspora are multifaceted and sophisticated consumers.