

Nominee: *Alice Karugaba*
Company Name: *Nina Interiors Limited*
Plot 41, Jinja Road
Industry: *Furniture*
Years in Business: *25 years*

Introduction

Nina Interiors was incorporated in July 1991 and has been in existence for the last 25 years. Before I started Nina Interiors, I used to hawk baked rolls what people call buns these days. It started in my house as this is where I used to do the baking work from and would sell to my colleagues and that way I would make money.

Nina interiors was not my idea. It was a suggestion by a friend of mine who owned a furniture company who encouraged me to sell his furniture but also complement it with curtains and chair clothing materials. I at first did not have the courage to do it but ended up doing it. When his factory stopped manufacturing furniture, I decided to continue the business and started importing. Our shop was at Uganda house and this was around 1989 after I had retired from East African development bank where I had worked as a secretary. At the time, my company was called Nina Ltd which later was formally incorporated into Nina Interiors Ltd in July 1991.

I was inspired by poverty to work. I had to fend for my family for food and school fees for the children and this encouraged me to start up the company. The beginning was humble with small capital. Nina deals in Home & Office Furniture, Custom made curtains and Blinds, Home Décor Accessories, Carpets, Lighting, and Garden / Outdoor Furniture

What would you describe as your biggest achievement?

The biggest achievement is ISO Certification, our opening another branch in another country which is bit difficult to function and also the different recognitions we have received over the years including being part of super brands and the top 100.

How is your product/service unique from others in the same industry?

We strive to provide quality products, Nina is all about quality. Our products are handpicked direct from the manufacturers whom we have built strong relationships. We also have very dedicated, hardworking and honest staff who are well informed about what Nina stands for.

What would you say are the major challenges experienced by your business and how have you managed to overcome them?

We are currently facing a lot of competition and the ground is not leveled well. We majorly import our products and there are some traders who do not pay import taxes religiously and end up having cheaper products on the market. We do business by compliance.

Others bring in low quality goods to the market and try to relate them to ones of Nina interiors yet they are not the same standard. We are trying to educate the buyers so that they can tell the differences between the ones that belong to Nina interiors from the rest. The other challenges are the economic times. The minimum salary in the countries where we import were raised, which also increased the prices of our products making them expensive for the target market. We are exploring more strategies to undertake import substitution as we gradually create local partnerships and capacity.

Where do you see your business in the next 3-5 years?

I would like to retire from actively managing the business and leave my managers to take over and even manage the business better, keeping the trend and also making it the best place to be.

We would like to start manufacturing and reduce on the importation. We also intend to widen our product range and make Nina a one stop centre for all office and home furniture and ware. We are also looking at expanding our presence in the region. We already have an outlet in Rwanda.

Apart from providing the product/service offered by your business, how has your business contributed to your community?

- CSR contribution of Cloth to women prisoners in Jinja to facilitate their tailoring project
- CSR contribution of Sewing machines to vocational school
- CSR contribution of cloth to Katalemwa Cheshire home to facilitate the tailoring project for Parents of children with disabilities
- Julie Lule Foundation supporting training of deaf children in vocational studies at Buganda Royal Institute

Advice to women

I advise and encourage women entrepreneurs to be very careful and also work very hard. They should make money, save it and also invest wisely. Always give the customer quality, do not compromise on quality for money, but above all, Start small and grow big gradually.

How has MTN Uganda contributed to your achievement?

MTN has enabled our communication since we operate regional wide. We use a lot of MTN products and services from voice to data, and internet solutions. Without reliable and affordable communication, our business would not move fast. We are planning to invest a lot on online solutions, and the Internet solutions by MTN will come in handy.