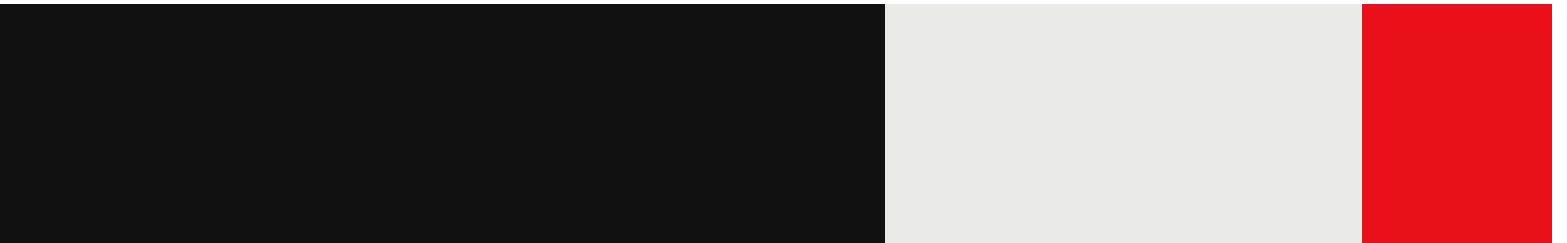


Q&A: Running into the new year with Oiselle

Article



Sally Bergesen

Founder and CEO, Oiselle



Insider Intelligence spoke with Sally Bergesen, founder and CEO of Oiselle, a women's running apparel brand that was started to create better performing athleticwear for professional and everyday runners. Oiselle supports elite runners, signing Lauren Fleshman in 2013, and since then expanded the team to a diverse set of athletes.

Insider Intelligence: Why did you start a women's running apparel company?

Sally Bergesen: I came to the realization that most running apparel was poor quality. It was made by running shoe companies that make their money on running shoes, and apparel items are an afterthought that they stick a logo on.

Looking at the history of running apparel, you notice that when women entered into sports in a meaningful way in the '70s and '80s, the clothing looked terrible. It was baggy and not

designed for the sports that women were playing. Fast forward 20 to 30 years and you find that because athletic apparel and athleisure are so popular, the market designs the clothing to accentuate and objectify female bodies.

One of the key motivators for me was to change the narrative around what it means to be a woman athlete to somebody who is strong from the inside out, as opposed to focusing on how she looks.

II: How did you approach the challenge of creating better running products for women?

SB: In the apparel world, people talk about fit, fabric, and features—the three Fs. There were a lot of things that were subpar in all three areas with traditional sports apparel. The fit of running shorts: Why are they so poufy and billowy? In terms of features, pockets could be in better places, and the list goes on. These are all things we have worked on with our apparel.

One of our product missions is to build a product that we call built for the “long run,” with the idea that fewer people will throw away their apparel.

II: How did you incorporate a sense of community into the ethos of your brand?

SB: I've loved running in all its different flavors—the solo runs, going fast and getting personal records, racing, mental health components brought by running, hanging out with my friends, and meeting people. But for me, it is the community connection and mental health benefits that are the most powerful.

We sponsor elite athletes and Olympians, and we've been operating with our vast team, the Volée, that includes thousands of women around the country. The beauty of running is that it can welcome everybody at any age, stage, life, or pace.

II: As a brand, why did you decide to suspend Facebook ads for a trial run?

SB: Like the rest of the world, we've been absorbing all the information being put out there about what these platforms do, how they operate, and who they impact. What's interesting with Oiselle is that our founding timing hit right when social media was becoming popular—we used it to our advantage when it was free. But the past three to four years have shown that the platforms take all that adoption that you've given them and are now turning the screws and charging you increasingly more money.

You layer on top of that what we're learning about how these platforms have impacted things like women's personal health. The research around how social media impacts girls and women

must not be discounted.

We decided that paid social ads on Facebook and Instagram were important, but we need to keep innovating and figure out if we can work without this. We're doing a test in the next two months to see how it goes and what other ideas we can bring to the fore because we still need to reach new people and grow the brand. My mantra lately has been people over platforms.