HOW ZAINA KIGENYI DROPPED ENGINEERING FOR MAKEUP

By Ranell Dickson Nsereko

In Uganda's fast-growing beauty industry, where creativity meets entrepreneurship, Zaina Kigenyi is steadily carving out a name for herself with international level breakthroughs.

In April 2025, in Kampala, she earned the Guinness World Record for the Most Lipstick Applications in One Minute, a feat of speed, precision and calm under pressure.

The founder of Zyna Makeup has transformed a simple love for cosmetics into a thriving beauty brand that offers professional makeup services and a range of beauty products tailored for African skin tones.

Trained as a construction engineer but drawn irresistibly to artistry, Kigenyi has turned passion into purpose, growing from doing makeup for friends and family into offering sought-after services and a fast-growing beauty retail brand known, especially for its lip products.



Kigenyi (fourth-right), who set the 2025 Guinness World Record for Most Lipstick Applications in One Minute, poses with the models during the attempt

TURNING PASSION INTO BUSINESS

Kigenyi's introduction to makeup artistry began as a hobby. She used to spend time experimenting with different looks and sharing them online simply because she enjoyed the creative process. At the time, she was not thinking about business.

"Initially, I was simply creating makeup content for fun and posting it online," Kigenyi says. "I loved experimenting with looks and sharing them with people on social media."

Everything changed when someone who had seen her work online contacted her for a professional makeup appointment. That first booking was a turning point.

"That moment was very eye-opening for me. It was when I realised that something I enjoyed doing creatively could also become a professional service that people were willing to pay for," Kigenyi says.

That single booking opened the door to a new possibility turning her passion into a profession.

STARTING SMALL WITH FAMILY SUPPORT

Yet behind the achievement is something just as powerful: A supportive beauty community that continues to cheer her on, share her work and keep her going as she builds a Ugandan-born brand with global ambition.

Like many entrepreneurs, Kigenyi's earliest clients were people closest to her. She began practicing on friends and family members as she built confidence and improved her skills.

During this time, Kigenyi continued posting her work online, allowing more people to discover her talent. Gradually, word-of-mouth recommendations began bringing in new clients.

Her journey was also supported by family encouragement. While in school, Kigenyi used part of the pocket money given to her by her father to purchase necessary makeup products.

"I also received my first proper makeup kit from my sister, Asha, which was incredibly meaningful for me," she says.

As she began earning money from makeup services, Kigenyi reinvested every shilling back into the business, gradually expanding her tools and products.

BEAUTY OVER ENGINEERING

Interestingly, Kigenyi's academic background is not in beauty. She trained as an engineer and later worked as a construction engineer with the Portuguese construction company, Mota-Engil.

"Engineering gave me strong analytical and problem-solving skills, but makeup allowed me to express my creativity," she says.

At first, Kigenyi intended to pursue makeup for only one year before returning fully to her engineering career. But as time passed, she realised where her true passion lay.

"There came a moment when I realised, I was thinking about makeup more than my regular job. Eventually, I had to choose one path, and makeup was what truly fulfilled me," she recalls.

Because she was still living at home, Kigenyi was able to save a large portion of her engineering salary and invest it into growing her beauty business.



Zaina Kigenyi is a makeup artist

BUILDING A BEAUTY BRAND

As her client base grew, Kigenyi noticed a recurring challenge in the local beauty market of the limited availability of high-quality products designed specifically for African skin tones. That observation inspired her to expand beyond makeup services and launch her own beauty products under the Zyna Makeup brand.

"As a woman who understands the needs of African skin tones and beauty preferences, I wanted to create products that celebrate African beauty and reflect what works best for us," she says.

Today, Zyna Makeup offers a wide range of products, including eyeshadow palettes, facial makeup and a variety of lip products such as lipsticks and lip tints. The brand has become particularly popular for its lip products.

Besides her own products, she also stocks other cosmetic brands, both drugstore and high-end, giving customers a variety of options.

Building a beauty product line requires careful planning and global partnerships. Kigenyi works with manufacturing partners in China and sources products from countries, including the US, UK and Kenya.

BREAKING A GUINNESS WORLD RECORD

One of the most remarkable milestones in Kigenyi's journey came in April 2025 when she attempted a record recognised by Guinness World Records.

The challenge was to achieve the Most Lipstick Applications in One Minute. The previous record stood at eight applications. During the intense 60-second challenge in Kampala, Kigenyi successfully completed nine.

"During those 60 seconds, everything was focused on speed and accuracy. Every movement mattered," Kigenyi' recalls.

When the official confirmation arrived, the achievement felt surreal.

ADVICE FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

For young people hoping to enter the beauty industry, Kigenyi emphasises persistence and understanding clients. She also believes education remains an important foundation.

"Education helps develop critical thinking and discipline. But after completing your education, you should also give yourself the freedom to explore your passions."

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has played a major role in the growth of Zyna Makeup. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have helped Kigenyi showcase her work and reach audiences far beyond her immediate circle.

"The growth of my business has been very community-driven," she says. "Social media has probably contributed to about 90% of the growth of my business at this stage."

By sharing tutorials and relatable content, she has built a loyal online community that continues to support her brand.

Many of her clients discover her through social media before eventually booking services or purchasing products.

"For a creative industry like beauty, visibility is everything and social media provides that platform," she adds.