

Challenger brands to watch in 2022: Oja - for delivering global, local

By [Susie Milburn](#), issued by [eatbigfish](#)

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Grocery is by no means a category short of disruption, or investment. Venture-backed grocery companies [raised over \\$10bn of funds](#) globally in 2021, with new entrants seemingly arriving as quickly as your next pint of milk.



'Whoosh', 'Zapp', 'Jiffy', 'Door Dash', 'Getir' (which abruptly translates as 'bring') – the latest wave of rapid grocery startups share one mission – speed. But London-based Oja has caught our attention by championing something that goes far beyond this category obsession. According to founder Mariam Jimoh, Oja's mission is to radically reshape grocery "by making foods from all cultures easily accessible from anywhere in the world."

Cultural groceries are hugely under-represented. For many, cooking a meal that reminds you of home requires a trip to an ironically limited 'World Foods' aisle, an out-of-town wholesaler or a speciality grocery several bus rides away – or sometimes all three.

Oja, which means 'market' in Yoruba, was born out of this frustration. With a recently re-launched app and website, Oja's platform provides a culturally specific shopping experience with groceries spanning everything you need to make a meal that reminds you of home – with the focus at launch on African and Caribbean groceries.

The brand is built around three pillars – familiarity, culture, and connection – a far cry from the brash speed and convenience that characterise their competitors. The option to shop 'bundles' (reminiscent of those your mum might send you home with), the question 'what are you cooking?' that accompanies a fresh meat order to make sure you get the perfect cut, and the familiar tone they use to talk about food ("*that" Fanta – if you know, you know") all make Oja an inviting place to want to spend time.



Founded in 2020, the company is at the beginning of its journey, and with limited resources for marketing at this early stage, it's no surprise that its sense of community is what currently drives demand. A recent trial saw 56% of growth from word-of-mouth alone, and Oja's smart micro-influencer strategy on social media creates a sense of community.

The [startup received \\$3.4m in pre-seed funding](#) at the end of 2021, and with UK e-commerce grocery sales set to [increase by around 50% to \\$63bn](#) by 2025, there is certainly space for a brand like Oja to inject some heat.

But much as Deliveroo's mission to 'bring the best local restaurants direct to people's doors' has been somewhat eclipsed by a war with Just Eat for the best KFC bucket deal, we'll be watching how Oja retains its sense of close community as it grows.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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