

**Below** ▶  
Natalia Vodianova is one of the launch line-up of supermodel avatars available to style on the DREST platform.

**Opposite** ▶  
Prestigious fashion titles *Harpers BAZAAR* & *PORTER* – the lifestyles that these titles promote serve as inspiration for the DREST gamer.



How a magazine editor became the CEO of a gaming company.

WORDS LUCY YEOMANS



**Lucy Yeomans** ▶  
Lucy Yeomans is Creator, Founder and co-CEO of DREST. After a stint as Features Editor and Deputy Editor of *Tatler*, Yeomans became Editor-in-Chief of *Harpers & Queen* in 2000, spearheading the successful transition of *Harpers & Queen* to *Harper's BAZAAR* six years later. In 2012, Yeomans became the Global Content Director of NET-A-PORTER.COM, launching firstly the company's weekly digital magazine, *The Edit*, in 2013, followed by the acclaimed print magazine, *PORTER*, in 2014. In February 2019, Yeomans set up her own fashion and technology business DREST – a game-changing ecosystem within both the mobile gaming and fashion markets, featuring over 160 of the world's leading fashion brands including Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Prada, Off-White, Loewe, Chloé, Thom Browne, Burberry and Stella McCartney.

The question I get asked most these days is, “Did you ever in your wildest dreams think one day you’d be the CEO of a gaming company?” It’s a fair comment. Until February of last year I was a die-hard fashion magazine editor-in-chief. I’d taken the reins of British *Harper’s Bazaar* when I was 29, moving on after 12 years when NET-A-PORTER’s visionary founder, my friend and former colleague, Natalie Massenet, persuaded me that launching a global media division out of a thriving e-commerce business would be an exciting next move.

At the time, this was greeted by the industry as a radical move – editorial content and e-commerce having never, until then, been so deeply or overtly linked. The closer alignment of the inspiration and purchase journeys was, however, never a problem to me, indeed quite the opposite. I saw the fusion as the perfect way to deliver a more seamless end-to-end fashion experience, the addition of a game-changing service element elevating the content experience.

This is how PORTER’S, the first shoppable global fashion magazine, was created, along with complementary weekly and daily digital content channels. In the print issue, we even featured brands that NET-A-PORTER didn’t stock, such as Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren, along with a concierge service to help readers track down these items. But it was the features on women, the arts, travel and lifestyle that added a voice and a depth of personality that rounded out the vision of the NET-A-PORTER woman. As Tiffanie Darke noted in a column for *Marketing Week*, PORTER’S had transformed NET-A-PORTER from a shop into a club for sophisticated women. Indeed, it was this aspect that I ended up being most proud of, in particular PORTER’S Incredible Women event and feature franchise that was launched to celebrate women making a difference in the world, and champion the causes they supported. Taking to the stage on World Oceans Day at the UN in New York with world-renowned oceanographer Sylvia Earl and Polish supermodel and environmentalist Anja Rubik, to speak about our issue dedicated to protecting the world’s oceans, was a career high. Harnessing the mass appeal of fashion to make a difference felt right.

Along with the rest of the fashion industry I observed the decline of traditional print titles, as audiences moved to digital and social channels. I watched social media creating a new raft of fashion stars – making stylists, art directors and photographers out of people outside the traditional publishing firmament. The influence that had for years been wielded by a select group of editors, stylists and writers was, it seemed, thrown wide open. But, and this concerned me, this was still limited to those who could either afford – or had access to – the product, and most crucially of all, looked a certain way. Was it really that much more democratic?

Earlier, I had become intrigued by the rise of gaming among a broader demographic. My interest was first piqued observing some of my stylish friends on Facebook inviting me to play something called FarmVille. I couldn’t quite believe they were devoting time competing to grow virtual strawberries and wheat plots. But something about the experience was compelling, despite the random subject matter. What, I thought, would it be like, if you could engage with a subject you actually cared about? It was clear, however, even then, that the perception of a gamer teenage boy in the bedroom was shifting. Cut to today, with the rise of mobile and a slew of more female-focused tech products and gaming stats have undergone a radical transformation. ▶



► The gaming population is now larger than that of film, television and music audiences combined and more than 60 per cent of mobile gamers are female. For any sector, gaming and community entertainment is clearly an area to consider seriously. Could, I wondered, luxury fashion ever take this leap of faith?

Another element that fascinated me was the correlations I observed between fashion and gaming. These weren't that obvious at first, but once given a little thought were actually quite striking. The fantasy, the escapism, the role-play... even the 'levelling-up' has parallels in fighting ones' way from the seventh or eighth row to the elusive front row at the runway shows each season, or securing access to better products and talent as one rises through the fashion ranks. One only has to watch *The Devil wears Prada* to see the similarities.

I also observed brands asking increasingly for ideas and content pitches that would resonate with Gen Z-ers and Millennials. These audiences require more nuance to connect with, placing a greater emphasis on their own point of view rather than that of the establishment. They see themselves as a tribe of creators, seeking outlets for self-expression, placing more value on authenticity and on making the world a better place – and thus need to be engaged in a radically different way.

Could a fashion game, giving lovers of style everywhere virtual access to all the elements that I had had at my fingertips as a magazine editor – the most exciting new season clothes, the top models, the hair, the make-up, even the dream locations to compete to create their own images – be a way for the top fashion brands to introduce and reinforce both their storytelling and their array of products each season to a larger audience? And what if every piece you styled and experimented with could also be shopped in real life?

And so DREST (the older English word for dressed), the world's first luxury fashion game was born, weaving inspirational real-time editorial content in the form of styling challenges, virtual and real-life new season clothes, avatars created from fashion and celebrity talent, as well as community features, allowing users to be inspired by the thousands of creations of other stylists.

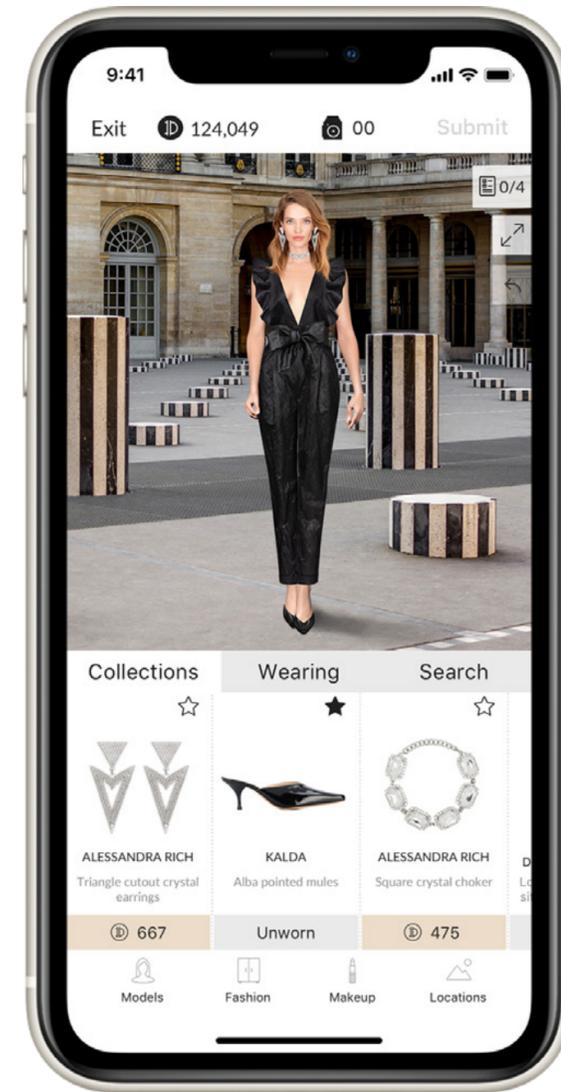
It's been a busy 12 months. One of the biggest challenges being finding the perfect balance between creating a luxurious yet playful, interactive and expressive experience. But, this time last year we hadn't signed one brand. Today we feature more than 160, including Gucci (our launch partner), Chloé, Prada, Stella McCartney, Off-White and Valentino. We have announced an exciting partnership with Farfetch, which provides much of the virtual fashion assortment (although we are also working with and linking directly to brands) thus offering our users a seamless global shopping experience.

Our virtual hair and make-up is designed by fashion industry heavyweights Sam McKnight, Josh Wood and Mary Greenwell. And we recently announced our line-up of supermodel avatars led by Russian supermodel, philanthropist and entrepreneur Natalia Vodianova, whose charitable giving app, Elbi, will be woven into the gameplay within DREST.

I have long been inspired by the idea of 'using one's airspace for good'. Encouraged personally by the work done at PORTER as well as being inspired by an industry that realises the importance of harnessing their valuable audiences to make a difference, we have embedded philanthropy in the very heart of DREST. In addition to creating interactive storytelling to support and promote the charities selected by our guest talent, our brands, our own company and, in time, our users, DREST is also making a very real commitment by donating five per cent of all in-app purchases to these pledged causes.

Sustainability is, of course, another factor constantly on our minds. As *Vogue Italia* recently highlighted and DREST also challenges; does the creation of all fashion imagery need to include travel or shipping entire wardrobes of clothes multiple times – all of which impacts the environment. We are also talking to a number of brands about using DREST to test products before putting them into production, so they can gauge audience interest by market and therefore scale their orders accordingly to avoid unnecessary waste. But, perhaps most importantly, we hope that our platform and others like it will lead to more thoughtful consumerism, allowing fashion lovers to either express themselves and experiment virtually - to "style before they buy".

I am so excited about the official launch of DREST this year, and my fervour has been heightened, not only by the positive response from both the fashion industry and gaming community, but also by the incredible engagement that we have witnessed since our early access launch last October. Each styling challenge takes just over 12 minutes to complete, and our users are playing three to four challenges per day, resulting in highly engaged average daily play times north of 30 minutes, usage stats I could only have dreamed of in my previous roles. Some fashion commentators have said that the bringing together of the worlds of fashion and gaming is an industry disruptor. I actually disagree. I see DREST, like other technology innovations, as simply a next natural step in the evolution and democratisation of the fashion content, inspiration and discovery journey. One that adds, I hope, a new layer of fun, creativity and delight to the experience, enabling audiences everywhere, and not just the select few, to discover and interpret first hand all our incredible world has to offer.



**Pictured •**  
The DREST gaming portal showing the in-game Photoshoot Challenge. Users create their own look using new season fashion products from top brands, dressing models chosen from a diverse and lifelike cast of avatars, as well as selecting hair, make-up and an array of inspiring locations and backdrops.

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