

Challenger brands to watch in 2022: RTFKT - for pushing the boundaries of sneakers

By [Jude Bliss](#), issued by [eatbigfish](#)

11 Apr 2022

No list of predictions for 2022 is complete without highlighting NFTs (non-fungible tokens), the unique digital art stored on the blockchain that's currently trading for eye-watering prices. A digital picture of a cat for \$172,000? Nope, me neither.

But this is a list of challenger brands, so first and foremost, RTFKT is most definitely 'a brand'.



Founded in 2020, RTFKT (pronounced 'artifact') Studios makes NFT sneakers. The company's aim is to become a highly visible and prominent brand in the metaverse in a similar way to how Nike or Adidas are in the physical world. "We want to be the brand of the metaverse," co-founder Chris Le, told [Coin Telegraph](#). "A person should be able to go into one VR game and see RTFKT, hop into an AR game and see RTFKT, and then into a PC game and see us again."

So what makes RTFKT a challenger?

What sets the company apart from other NFT brands is their clear point of view. They believe that the sneaker category has gone stale and is out of ideas. With the industry dominated mainly by Nike and Adidas, and their most popular sneakers still based on the designs they launched in the late 80s and early 90s, it's hard to disagree.

"The contemporary sneaker market is quite boring," co-founder Benoit Pagotto told [\\$Whale Community](#). "There are some iconic shoe silhouettes that repeatedly receive new colourways. [...] manufacturing sneakers is costly, so it's way more efficient to set up all the machinery for one model and just change colourways and do simple adjustments. We can see the boredom in the market. And that's our niche." This belief in countering sneaker boredom powers RTFKT and sits at the heart of the studio's innovation and creativity.

RTFKT's sneakers are bold, imaginative and bursting with insane ideas that borrow heavily from the art world, cinema and video game culture. Free from the constraints of the physical and material world, RTFKT pushes the boundaries of sneakers metaphorically but also literally — the designs extend way beyond a traditional sneaker silhouette with form and colour combinations previously unimaginable.



In early 2020, an image surfaced online of Elon Musk wearing a pair of RTFKT sneakers inspired by his Cybertruck. RTFKT posted the photo to its Instagram, tagging Elon Musk, and it quickly went viral. The photo, however, wasn't real. RTFKT had photoshopped the image. Of course, real or not, it didn't matter, the image blew up on social media, was picked up by industry media, and RTFKT's hype train rolled on. It was an incredibly effective and subversive guerilla marketing campaign that would have made any resourceful challenger brand proud.

With the expected growth of the metaverse and the idea that many of us will be purchasing trainers for our digital avatars to wear in the near future, it's clear that the large global sportswear giants may have a challenge on their hands from not just a new competitor, but from another world entirely.

And that's why Nike snapped RTFKT up in December last year for an undisclosed amount, although the studio reportedly received a valuation of \$33m in May 2021.

It's easy to imagine Nike bringing RTFKT's technology in-house to launch its own Nike-branded NFTs in the very near future, which could well spell the end for RTFKT as a brand after all.

But for now, 2022 is RTFKT's year.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jude Bliss is creative director at eatbigfish.

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