The Reality of Redbubble: An Artist’s Perspective

Is it really working *for* the creators?

By Amber Safeer

Let’s set the scene: It’s the year 2020, and you are a bored teenager during lockdown with a desire to fill your vacant laptop with cute relatable stickers to bring you a twinge of joy during the dark times. You could search on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/) for stickers, sure, but you are looking for that uber-niche “[Je Suis Calme!](https://www.redbubble.com/i/sticker/Je-suis-calme-by-whoisme/38616495.EJUG5)” sticker from Taylor Swift’s hit song, “[ME!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuXNumBwDOM)” Naturally, you go to the single website that handles all your fangirl needs: [Redbubble](https://www.redbubble.com/).

Okay, so maybe that scenario is a little specific. Nevertheless, Redbubble has been a popular consumer destination for artists and fans alike for many years. I personally decided that I wanted to start *selling* on Redbubble around 2021. I had time to kill, a drawing tablet, and a sketching program. So, I have been on both the receiving and delivering end of Redbubble; both a customer and an artist. These experiences have given me a unique perspective on the platform, one that I think is important for *everyone* to hear if they’ve ever considered using the website.

**Discovering Redbubble as a Consumer**

From an outsiders’ perspective, Redbubble is a really promising e-commerce platform, as it is similar to sites such as [Etsy](https://www.etsy.com/), except one company handles all of the manufacturing and delivering (as opposed to individual sellers). The user interface is very simple to navigate and provides easy ways to search your favorite content or explore new ideas/creators. The prices are fair, the designs are beautiful, *and* you get to be a part of something that directly benefits artists – what could be better? However, on occasion, you will find repeated designs as you scroll through the feed. For instance, when I look up “frog cowboy stickers,” I notice that some of the graphics are eerily similar if not exactly alike. Surely this is *not* demonstrating a fatal flaw in the mechanics of Redbubble and is instead just an odd coincidence that happens from time to time.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

**Becoming a Redbubbler**

When I first started out as an artist on Redbubble, I had no idea what to expect. Thankfully for me, making a creator account on Redbubble and listing my designs were extremely easy. The only issues I ran into were trying to figure out image dimensions/resolutions, but luckily Redbubble provides [countless articles](https://blog.redbubble.com/2017/03/image-resolution-and-printing/) for sellers to learn the basics of their platform. Luckily, because I have great friends, a bunch of them bought stickers from me (and I decided to get myself a shirt). The quality was mediocre, but it was surreal to have something I created printed on a physical t-shirt. I was also ecstatic that making my profile and selling my designs was completely free, though each sale wasn’t very lucrative because Redbubble needed money to take care of manufacturing, shipping, etc. Nevertheless, it was exactly what I needed: a place to easily get my art out there without having to handle an entire small business on my shoulders.

A screenshot demonstrating how artists can markup their prices to turn more profit.

Description automatically generated

**The Waiting Game**

Aside from a few of my friends purchasing my designs, there was low traffic on my account, no matter how much I promoted it on social media. However, I really could not expect much with my measly four designs: it was like throwing a needle into a haystack. As a result, I also did not end up getting paid (at least, not for a while) because I did not meet the [payment threshold](https://help.redbubble.com/hc/en-us/articles/360027407652-What-is-the-Artist-Payment-Threshold) of $20.00. Personally, I never understood why the payment threshold existed in the first place, but at the very least Redbubble *does* eventually pay their creators.

**Controversy Appears**

While my experience with Redbubble may differ from yours, there is one thing that creatives can agree on: Redbubble is detrimental to independent artists. How? Well, let’s take a step back to those “duplicated” designs we were talking about earlier. In the following image, we can see that there appears to be the same frog graphic, each with a different colored hat. Look closer, and it is evident that these are from two entirely separate creators. Now, that means either one is ripping off the other, or they are *both* illegally using someone else’s design to turn a profit.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

Yikes.

Redbubble has articles on “[what to do if someone steals your art,](https://help.redbubble.com/hc/en-us/articles/360052266871-What-can-I-do-if-my-works-are-being-used-somewhere-on-the-Internet-without-my-permission#:~:text=If%20you%20happen%20to%20find,from%20other%20websites%20for%20you.)” and claims that they work to prevent art fraud, but the truth is, theft is rampant on the site. Because anyone and everyone can sell, non-artists find it fair to sell other people’s work without consent, or even worse, utilize AI generated images to sell. At this point, it is near impossible to tell who can be trusted. Sure, *some* accounts seem to be verified, but there is no transparency on Redbubble’s end as to what this actually means, and their reputation only continues to worsen as the years go on.

**Tiers for Fears**

Remember how I mentioned that selling designs is completely free? Well, that is only partially true. Starting in May of last year, Redbubble introduced “[artist tiers](https://blog.redbubble.com/2023/04/new-artist-account-tiers/),” where they classify your account as either Standard, Premium, or Pro. Each tier brings their own benefits, however accounts at the Standard Tier are forced to pay an account on top of what they sell. What’s worse, you cannot choose to be in a certain tier – you are placed there based on certain “[classifications](https://blog.redbubble.com/2023/04/how-accounts-are-reviewed-and-classified/)” that are vague and truly help no one. Redbubble only continues to push out updates that deter the very people the platform was made for: independent artists.



**Conclusions**

While Redbubble appears to be an innocent platform on the surface, there is much more to it than meets the eye. If you are someone who cares at all about small businesses or supporting independent artists, then please, steer clear of Redbubble. Their mission long ago may have had good intentions, but it is evident that as their company slowly falls victim to bankruptcy, they will do anything to keep afloat. If you’re really looking for cute, unique designs, then shop small. It may cost more, but at least you know you’re not feeding into the soul-sucking corporate machine.