Marketing Doctor

Marketing Check-up

Tim Hortons

As of October 27, 2026

Condition: Under observation

Repairs made, momentum fading

Tim Hortons is the biggest seller of coffee and doughnuts in Canada, and a brand many Canadians treat as part of the country. Since Burger King agreed to buy it in 2014, it has fought its franchisees in court, fallen in reputation rankings, drawn a privacy finding against its app and rebuilt its sales. As of October 27, 2026, comparable sales growth in Canada has almost stopped. This check-up looks at what was repaired and what is fading.

Key takeaways

- After the 2014 deal, a public fight between the owner and franchisees over the advertising fund came before a fall from 4th to 50th in Leger's 2018 corporate reputation study. A proposed settlement followed in 2019.
- In 2022, four privacy authorities found that the Tim Hortons app had tracked users' locations every few minutes, even when it was not open.
- Sales recovered after the pandemic, but Canadian comparable sales growth slowed from 4.3% in 2024 to 2.8% in 2025 and 0.1% in the second quarter of 2026.
- The parent company's CEO said the marketing calendar fell short of expectations. A calendar built on launches needs brand building underneath it.

Marketing health check

Area	Finding
Franchisee relations	Repaired. A settlement and an ad fund review since 2019.
Reputation	Hit hard in 2018: from 4th to 50th in Leger's study.
Customer trust	Tested. A 2022 privacy finding against the app.
Sales momentum	Fading. Canadian comparable sales up 0.1% in Q2 2026.
Marketing calendar	Short of expectations, the CEO said.
Competition	Rising. Dunkin' is preparing to return to Canada.

Timeline

When	What happened
Aug 2014	Burger King agrees to buy Tim Hortons.
Dec 12, 2014	The deal closes under the new parent, Restaurant Brands International.
2017	Franchisees form the Great White North Franchisee Association; one sues over the ad fund.
Apr 2018	Leger's reputation study ranks Tim Hortons 50th, down from 4th.
Mar 2019	Tim Hortons and franchisees sign a proposed settlement.
2020 to 2021	Canadian same-store sales fall 16.5%, then rise 10.8%.
Jun 1, 2022	Privacy authorities find the app violated privacy laws.
2024 to Q2 2026	Canadian comparable sales growth slows from 4.3% to 0.1%.

What happened: an icon inside a global group

In August 2014, Burger King agreed to buy Tim Hortons. Tim Hortons' chief executive at the time said that "Tim Hortons will still be Tim Hortons following this transaction." The deal closed in December 2014 under a new parent, Restaurant Brands International (RBI), which also owns Burger King. Placing a national icon inside a portfolio is a brand architecture decision: it sets who the brand answers to.

The diagnosis: three hits to the brand

- **Owner and franchisees at odds.** In 2017 a group of franchisees formed the Great White North Franchisee Association, and a Toronto franchisee sued Tim Hortons and RBI, alleging money had been diverted from the advertising fund. Tim Hortons denied the allegations. In April 2018, Leger's corporate reputation study ranked Tim Hortons 50th, down from 4th, and the Reputation Institute ranked it 67th of 250 companies, down from 13th. The Canadian Press noted the drop followed the public dispute. In March 2019 the two sides signed a proposed settlement that included money for local advertising and a franchisee review of ad fund spending.
- **An app that collected too much.** In June 2022, Canada's federal privacy commissioner and the authorities of Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta found that the Tim Hortons app had violated privacy laws. It recorded users' movements every few minutes, even when it was not open, and inferred where they lived and worked. B.C.'s commissioner said a marketing strategy is no excuse to spy on customers. Tim Hortons agreed to delete the remaining location data and set up a privacy management program. A loyalty app is part of a customer retention strategy, and it works only if customers trust what it collects.
- **Customers drifting before the pandemic.** CNBC reported that sales and traffic were stagnating before the pandemic as Canadians chose Starbucks or McDonald's for coffee.

The result: recovery, then a slowdown

Canadian same-store sales fell 16.5% in 2020 and rose 10.8% in 2021, and executives set out a back-to-basics plan, CNBC reported. Growth has since slowed. Canadian comparable sales rose 4.3% in 2024 and 2.8% in 2025, then, as Retail Insider reported, 1.5% in the first quarter of 2026 and 0.1% in the second.

RBI chief executive Josh Kobza acknowledged, according to Retail Insider, that the marketing calendar fell short of expectations. The brand was up against major launches from a year earlier.

The treatment now: openings, drinks and rewards

The response includes about 80 Canadian openings in 2026, a Canadian investment program funded mostly by restaurant owners, new drinks such as matcha and Soda Swirls, and a link between Tims Rewards and Canadian Tire's Triangle Rewards. Retail Insider also reports that Dunkin' is preparing to return to Canada. A calendar built on launches is sales activation, and it needs brand building underneath it.

Lessons for your marketing

1. When owners and operators fight in public, it shows up in reputation rankings. Keep partners aligned.
2. Collect only the customer data you can defend. Regulators, and customers, find out.
3. Give customers a reason to visit that does not depend on this month's promotion.
4. Balance launches with steady brand building, so one weak calendar doesn't show in the numbers.
5. When a national icon joins a larger group, decide early what stays local.

The doctor will see you now.

Book a free marketing check-up at marketingdoctor.ca/contact. We'll examine your marketing, show you what's holding growth back and prescribe what to fix first.

Sources

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