



# BTRMLK: Crafting the Perfect Recipe for Brand Expansion

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## INTRODUCTION

Shad Haidar and Monia Elhayek watched as a steady stream of customers spilled out the doors of their London, Ontario, restaurant, BTRMLK. As co-owners, they wondered what strategies they should use to sustain the success of their cherished restaurant. Should they narrow BTRMLK's customer demographic? Expand locations within Ontario? What promotional strategy should accompany these decisions? These questions weighed heavily on Haidar's and Elhayek's minds as they observed the line grow longer and longer.

## HISTORY

### BTRMLK

Established in 2020 and officially opened in 2021, BTRMLK was a fried chicken restaurant with niche product selection and exclusive take-out service. BTRMLK prided itself on delivering high-quality food and exceptional, fast service to local students, families, and construction workers in central London.<sup>1</sup>

### Shad Haidar and Monia Elhayek

Haidar and Elhayek both grew up, attended university, and started their careers in London. They graduated from Western University, where Haidar earned a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Political Science and Criminology, and Elhayek earned a Bachelor of Health Sciences Honours. Post-graduation, they both gained valuable business experience working in sales and banking. However, Haidar always imagined working for himself.

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[1] BTRMLK's chicken was halal-certified; the certificate was available upon request.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Haidar and Elhayek took a leap of faith by experimenting with fried chicken recipes and offering meals to friends and family out of their garage. Inspired by this success, they then began selling chicken through regular pop-ups to local community members. With the help of Elhayek's creative social media content promoting BTRMLK, along with brand recognition from locals, the customer base skyrocketed. Seeing the opportunity, the owners invested their personal savings to establish a brick-and-mortar store on Wharncliffe Road and Oxford Street, strategically situated in between Western University's campus and downtown London.

The grand opening was a resounding success. Customers lined up out the door all day, and this trend continued for weeks. Three years later in 2024, BTRMLK's brand continued to be associated with a long line for delicious fried chicken.

## INDUSTRY

In 2024, the Canadian fast food industry generated \$36.4 billion in revenue, with an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.7% until 2029 (Exhibit 1).<sup>2</sup> Revenue streams were driven by popular products, such as burgers, chicken, sandwiches, and pizza, which were known for their convenience and unhealthy, indulgent appeal. McDonald's was the industry leader, holding 14.3% of the market share, followed by Tim Hortons, Subway, and A&W. However, the market included a plethora of global chains and single-location restaurants, collectively constituting 65.3% of the market share (Exhibit 2). With over 406,000 employees and 20,592 businesses, the industry was competitive and fragmented.

Challenges for new businesses in this industry included competition, low profit margins (a mere 3.7% due to high wages and input costs), and strict health and safety regulations. Businesses also competed with traditional home-cooked meals and, increasingly, food subscription services, which offered consumers customizable, healthy meal options and easy, east-cooked meals. Given the range of restaurants and meal choices available to consumers, fast food restaurants had to maintain high levels of affordability and convenience to compete with one other and the alternatives. Some of these barriers were offset by the relatively low costs of leasing premises, equipment, and furniture, and the limited need for industry-specific expertise.

Sustainability and environmental friendliness were other new trends that affected the industry. Over 60% of Canadians were willing to pay up to 20% more for sustainable products. Many chose chicken products over beef, because of the negative impacts of cattle farming, such as water-intensive processes and high-carbon emissions.<sup>3</sup> While an estimated 48% of Canadians consumed fast food at least once per week, a notable 70% began adopting a health-conscious lifestyle by reducing meat consumption and dining out.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 5% of Canadians were Muslim, with a higher concentration in London at 6.7% and even higher in Toronto at 9.1%, whose faith had instructions on Halal requirements.<sup>5</sup> The word "Halal" was Arabic for "permissible" and was often used to refer to meat that was prepared and processed in accordance with Islamic dietary laws, as outlined in the Quran.<sup>6</sup>

[2] Le T. (January 2024), "Fast Food Restaurants in Canada," *IBIS World*, <https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ca/en/industry/72221aca/at-a-glance>.

[3] Baldassarre C. (March 2024), "Major Household Appliances Canada 2022," Deloitte LPP, <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/docs/industries/consumer/2023/gx-consumer-creating-value-from-sustainable-products-aoda.pdf>.

[4] Seale E., De Gogh M., and Greene-Finestone L. (January 2023), "Fast food consumption in adults living in Canada: alternative measurement methods, consumption choices, and correlates," Canadian Science Publishing, <https://cdnsiencepub.com/doi/full/10.1139/apnm-2022-0252#:~:text=Overall%2C%20an%20estimated%2048%25%20of,smallest%20proportion%20of%20FF%20consumers>; Brown J. (January 2023), "Are Canadians doing enough to eat healthy?," Health Council Canada, <https://www.healthcouncilcanada.ca/category/food-and-diet/>.

[5] (December 2022), "Distribution (in percentage) of main religious groups, London, 2011 and 2021," *Statistics Canada*, [https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=e&dguid=2021S0503555&objectId=2\\_1](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=e&dguid=2021S0503555&objectId=2_1); (December 2022) "Distribution (in percentage) of main religious groups, Toronto, 2011 and 2021," Statistics Canada, [https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=e&dguid=2021A00053520005&objectId=2\\_2](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=e&dguid=2021A00053520005&objectId=2_2).

[6] Fragiskos C. (August 2024), "The halal food industry: A growing global phenomenon," *EDC*, <https://www.edc.ca/en/article/halal-food-exporting-opportunities.html#1>.

Demand for third-party delivery services, like Uber and DoorDash, had increased since the pandemic for providing convenient access to a range of food options. Lockdowns and physical distancing also led to an increased reliance on social media to stay connected to peers and access news around the world; usage continued to rise.<sup>7</sup> Other consequences of the pandemic included high inflation and unemployment rates, which lessened disposable income and prompted a trend toward homemade or budget-friendly meals.<sup>8</sup>

## COMPETITORS

### Kosmos

Kosmos Eatery operated two chicken restaurants at Wonderland Road and Oxford Street, and at Covent Garden Market in London. Featuring an extensive menu with over 60 SKUs priced between \$20 and \$30, Kosmos offered a diverse selection of appetizers, burgers, sandwiches, wraps, and macaroni and cheese, which could be further customized by protein options—chicken, beef, or vegetarian. Operating hours were Tuesday to Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm for dine in, take out, and catering, and closed Monday. Rated 4.4 stars on Google Review, with 45 comments, Kosmos was highly rated for its large, delicious portions.<sup>9</sup>

### 808 Chicken House

808 Chicken House was another chicken restaurant at Hyde Park Road and Gainsborough Road in London. Contrary to Kosmos, 808 Chicken House boasted a niche menu featuring only 11 SKUs, including chicken burgers, fried chicken, and chicken tenders. Meals ranged from \$10 to \$20. Operating hours were Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 9 pm for dine in and take out. 808 Chicken House's high-quality chicken and unique dining ambience earned it a 4.8 star-rating on Google Reviews.<sup>10</sup>

### Chick-fil-A

Founded in the US in 1946, Chick-fil-A opened its first location in Toronto in 2019 and later expanded to London in November 2023. Chick-fil-A was the largest fast food chain specializing in chicken. Meals ranged from \$10 to \$20 with substantial options. The menu featured over 100 SKUs, including varieties of chicken sandwiches, chicken nuggets, chicken strips, waffle fries, macaroni and cheese, salads, soft drinks, and desserts. Operating hours were Monday to Saturday from 10:30 am to 11 pm for dine in, take out, delivery, and catering. The London location was in the south end of the city, and there was a possibility that a new location would open in the north end of the city near Western University by late 2025. Although new to London, Chick-fil-A's national recognition and scale could present significant challenges to existing competitors in the city's chicken industry.<sup>11</sup>

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[7] Abrar L. (July 2024), "Social media use and mental health among young Canadians: Insights from the COVID-19 pandemic," *Helix*, <https://thehelixfoundation.ca/social-media-use-and-mental-health-among-young-canadians-insights-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

[8] O'Neill A. (May 2025), "Canada - Inflation rate 1987-2030," Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271247/inflation-rate-in-canada/>;  
O'Neill A. (June 2025), "Canada - Unemployment rate 2005-20324," Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271247/inflation-rate-in-canada/>.

[9] "Kosmos," Kosmos Catering, <https://kosmoscatering.ca>.

[10] "808 Chicken House," 808 Chicken House, <https://808chickenhouse.wixsite.com/808-chicken>.

[11] "Chick-fil-A," Chick-fil-A, <https://www.chick-fil-a.ca>.

## McDonald's

McDonald's was the largest global fast-food chain, operating over 200 locations in London, including across the street from BTRMLK on Wharncliffe Road and Oxford Street. While McDonald's offered hundreds of SKUs, such as burgers, chicken nuggets, sandwiches, wraps, soups, smoothies, desserts and coffee, it did not focus primarily on chicken, like Kosmos and 808 Chicken House. Meals were ranged from \$10 and \$15 and were available 24/7 for take out, and 6 am to 10 pm for dine in. McDonalds leveraged its economies of scale and brand recognition to attract and retain customers.

See Exhibit 3 for a map of BTRMLK and its direct competitors.

## CONSUMERS

BTRMLK's customer base primarily comprised students and construction workers. In 2024, Western's student population was approximately 42,000, the majority of whom were between the ages of 17 and 25.<sup>13</sup> Fanshawe College had a student population of approximately 43,000, with ages ranging from 17 to 54.<sup>14</sup> While not as close to BTRMLK as Western, its campuses downtown and in East London were only a short drive away from BTRMLK's brick-and-mortar location. Many students had limited disposable income, typically allocating \$200 to \$600 per month for food, and they often received financial assistance from parents for expenses such as rent, groceries, and tuition.<sup>15</sup> Students therefore prioritized affordable and convenient meal options.

In 2024, there were approximately 34,400 construction workers, primarily aged between 25 and 54 in London.<sup>16</sup> Despite prevailing interest rates preventing infrastructure investments, increased immigration in Canada required more homes and residential buildings, which then increased the need for construction workers in the near future.<sup>17</sup> Construction workers earned between \$16 and \$36 per hour and worked long, labor-intensive days.<sup>18</sup> They had more disposable income than students, and they appreciated large portions at affordable prices.

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[12] "McDonalds," McDonalds, <https://www.mcdonalds.com/ca/en-ca.html>.

[13] "Facts & Figures," Western University, <https://www.uwo.ca/about/whoweare/facts.html>; Peters D. (November 2018), "What is it like to be an unusually young university student," *The Globe and Mail*, [https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/education/canadian-university-report/article-what-it-is-like-to-be-an-unusually-young-university-student/#:~:text=Statistics%20Canada%20reported%20in%202010,\(including%20college\)%20w-as%2024](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/education/canadian-university-report/article-what-it-is-like-to-be-an-unusually-young-university-student/#:~:text=Statistics%20Canada%20reported%20in%202010,(including%20college)%20w-as%2024).

[14] (2022) "Fanshawe Facts," Fanshawe College, <https://www.fanshawec.ca/sites/default/files/2022-11/2021-22%20Fanshawe%20Facts.pdf>; "About Fanshawe," *Fanshawe College*, <https://www.fanshawec.ca/about-fanshawe#>.

[15] "Cost of Living in Canada," *GoStudy*, <https://www.go.study/cost-of-living-for-students-in-canada/#:~:text=Food%20Cost%20in%20Canada,to%20CAD%2015%20per%20person>.

[16] "Construction (NAICS 23): Ontario, 2023-2025," *Government of Canada*, <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/trend-analysis/job-market-reports/ontario/sectoral-profile-construction>.

[17] De Bono N. (November 2023), "London must add 40,000 workers as key economic sectors surge: Analysis," *The London Free Press*, <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/london-must-add-40000-workers-as-key-economic-sectors-surge-analysis>.

[18] "Construction (NAICS 23): Ontario, 2023-2025," *Government of Canada*, <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/trend-analysis/job-market-reports/ontario/sectoral-profile-construction>.

## BTRMLK TODAY

BTRMLK had great success at their one brick-and-mortar location between Western University and downtown London. They maintained a niche value proposition by offering a limited menu with only four item categories: fried chicken sandwiches, fried chicken strips, deluxe fries, and deluxe macaroni and cheese (Exhibit 4). Meals at BTRMLK typically ranged from \$10 to \$20. Haidar and Elhayek believed that maintaining their product and pricing strategy was crucial for retaining customers and sustaining their competitive advantage. See Exhibit 5 for prices and costs.

BTRMLK had approximately 25 staff, including supervisors, team leads, and part-time workers, who were typically university students. Operating hours were Tuesday to Sunday from 12 pm to 8 pm, and closed Monday. Employee shifts were divided into two five-hour time slots: 10:30 am to 3:30pm and 3:30 pm to 8:30 pm. Both shifts had the same staffing structure: three cooks, two team leads, and one supervisor. Haidar and Elhayek adopted a hands-off management style, checking in four days per week in person. Their management philosophy was “you work with me, not for me” to promote direct feedback, employee and customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency.

## VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Haidar and Elhayek realized that the demand for their products was exceeding supply, and they would need to expand their reach by opening more locations. They envisioned BTRMLK growing to become the fried chicken equivalent of Shake Shack, which was a trendy burger and milkshake restaurant with only one store in each of the world’s biggest cities. For any of the proposed expansion strategies, Haidar and Elhayek could secure short-term debt to fund the expansion at a 5% interest rate.

Since opening, BTRMLK grew its online presence from 2,000 followers to over 30,000 followers on Instagram, and it benefited from word-of-mouth promotion and strong brand recognition to attract consumers. Haidar and Elhayek allocated \$5,000 for additional promotional activities and wanted to ensure their choices aligned with their target market, organizational capabilities, and expansion plan.

### Opening a Second Storefront

Haidar and Elhayek’s first consideration was to open a second restaurant in the south end of London, near newly built residential neighbourhoods. This expansion would allow BTRMLK to capitalize on their existing brand awareness to entice new customers to the second location. They could also target more Fanshawe College students, construction workers in the developing neighbourhoods nearby, and the residents of both London and nearby St. Thomas.

The new location would operate Tuesday to Sunday from 12 pm to 8 pm, split into two five-hour shifts for employees. Anticipating a gradual increase in customers, Haidar and Elhayek would hire ten part-time employees, so they would have one supervisor, one team lead, and three cooks per shift. BTRMLK would employ a tiered wage system: cooks would be paid \$18 per hour, team leads would be paid \$20 per hour, and supervisors would be paid \$22 per hour. Prior to opening day, employees would be required to complete 10 hours of training, paid at their hourly rate. Similar to BTRMLK's current location, they would only offer take out, which would require only 1,700 square feet for their restaurant. Rent and utilities for the space would cost \$15 per square foot per month.<sup>19</sup> Haidar and Elhayek would need to pay for renovations to upgrade the commercial space into a kitchen, which would cost \$30,000.<sup>20</sup> They would also need to lease equipment, which would cost \$1,000 per month. The required health inspection would cost approximately \$500, and the annual business license cost \$200.<sup>21</sup>

## Purchasing a Food Truck

BTRMLK could also purchase a food truck to serve multiple cities, such as London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton, and Toronto (Exhibit 6). This approach would allow BTRMLK to test different markets with a smaller investment of time and money, and allow for maintaining and expanding their student customer base by targeting other universities in Southwestern Ontario. However, logistics could be difficult, since students were primarily on campus Monday to Friday and locations were all one to two hours away from London. The food truck would therefore operate during the week, visiting one of five campuses each day. The distance would require Haidar and Elhayek to hire staff to work full time to effectively managing the food truck operations. They would hire three full-time employees to operate the truck and pay them \$25 per hour. Employees would work 10 hours on average, allowing for six to nine hours of sales, based on the location. Employee benefits would cost \$10,000 per person annually, and all three hires would require 10 hours of paid training before launching the food truck.<sup>22</sup> The initial investment for the truck would cost \$70,000.<sup>23,24</sup> Haidar and Elhayek estimated that annual fuel and maintenance would cost \$25,000. They would also need to pay a one-time fee for a health inspection of the food truck, a Food Handling certificate, and a Mobile Vending permit, which would cost \$200.

## Expand to Toronto

Haidar and Elhayek could open a brick-and-mortar store in Toronto. As the capital of Ontario, Toronto was the most populous and multicultural city in Canada, and it was the country's financial and commercial district. However, Toronto was a two-hour drive away from London, which would make it difficult for Haidar and Elhayek to manage and oversee both locations. The food industry was a much more competitive in Toronto, with over 9,300 restaurants.<sup>25</sup> Selecting the right location in Toronto would be crucial to avoid alienating BTRMLK's current customer base of working-class individuals and students. The new location would operate Tuesday to Sunday from 12 pm to 8 pm. Shifts would be the same as the original location, with two five-hour time slots.

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[19] "3-1255 Commissioners Road W," *Realtor*, <https://www.realtor.ca/real-estate/28134549/3-1255-commissioners-road-w-london-south-south-w-south-w>.

[20] (May 2021), "How much does it cost to build a commercial kitchen?," *Mathias Foodservice Equipment Company*, <https://mathiasfoodservice.com/2021/05/how-much-does-a-commercial-kitchen-cost/>.

[21] "Business licenses," *City of London*, <https://london.ca/business-development/business-licences>.

[22] (December 2021), "How much do benefits cost employers?," *CanadaLife*, <https://www.canadalife.com/insurance/business-insurance/cost-of-benefits-for-employers.html>.

[23] The truck would have a life of 10 years and would be depreciated on a straight-line basis.

[24] "Trailers, food trucks & container customization," *Food Truck Canada*, <https://www.foodtruckcanada.ca/>.

[25] Campbell T. (March 2024), "How many restaurants are in Toronto – Report," *snappy*, <https://gosnappy.io/blog/how-many-restaurants-in-toronto/>.

Haidar and Elhayek would hire eight part-time staff, and they would start operations with four employees per shift: one supervisor, one team lead, and two cooks. Since the cost of living was higher in Toronto than in London, each cook would be paid \$20 per hour, each team lead would be paid \$22 per hour, and each supervisor would be paid \$24 per hour. Prior to opening, the part-time employees would be required to complete 10 hours of paid training. Haidar and Elhayek would also hire a full-time manager to oversee day-to-day operations, paying them a salary and benefits of \$65,000. Monthly rent of the 1,500 square foot restaurant space was estimated at \$27 per square foot and leased equipment would cost \$1,500 per month.<sup>26</sup> Prior to opening, kitchen renovations would cost \$50,000 and the health inspection would cost \$700. Annual business licensing fees would be \$300.<sup>27</sup>

### Additional Promotion

Haidar and Elhayek also considered increasing BTRMLK's presence on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok through paid digital advertisements. Facebook and Instagram targeted individuals aged 25 to 50, whereas Instagram and Tik Tok targeted younger demographics aged 18 to 35. BTRMLK had already established a strong follower base on Instagram and Facebook, but they could reach new markets through additional targeted posts or other platforms, like TikTok.

Other promotional options included hard print media, such as flyers or posters. Creating and mailing flyers would cost the same in London and Toronto, however, posters in public transit would be more expensive in Toronto than in London. Flyers and posters would increase visibility and create brand awareness in Toronto. They might, however, be counterproductive to BTRMLK's focus on word-of-mouth promotion, which aimed to make the brand appear exclusive and premium in London. See Exhibit 7 for further details about promotional options.

## DECISION

BTRMLK had proven its success since its grand opening, and Haidar and Elhayek were determined to further this growth and become the next Shake Shack of fried chicken. To achieve this goal, they first had to solidify BTRMLK's value proposition, and develop a new strategies for distributions and promotions.

[26] "207 Augusta Avenue," *Cushman & Wakefield*, <https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/canada/properties/ontario/retail-for-lease-toronto>.

[27] "Eating of drinking establishment - City of Toronto," *City of Toronto*, <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/permits-licences-bylaws/restaurants-cafes-grocery-variety-and-retail-stores-selling-food/eating-or-drinking-establishment/>.

EXHIBIT #1

Fast Food Revenue & Growth<sup>28</sup>

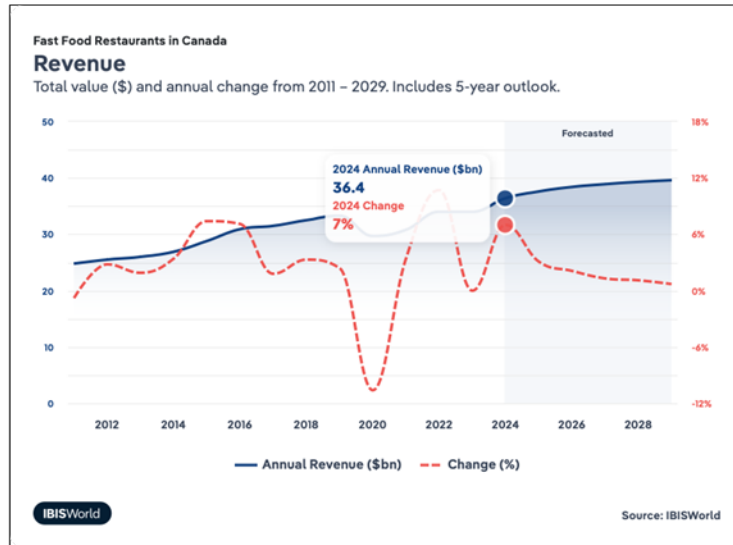
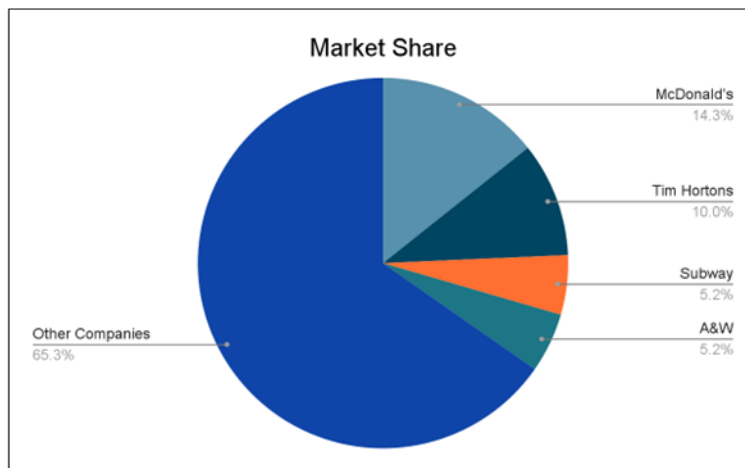


EXHIBIT #2

Fast Food Market Share<sup>29</sup>



[28] Le T. (January 2024), "Fast Food Restaurants in Canada," *IBIS World*, <https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/ca/en/industry/72221aca/at-a-glance>.

[29] *ibid.*

EXHIBIT #3

London Map with BTRMLK and Competitors

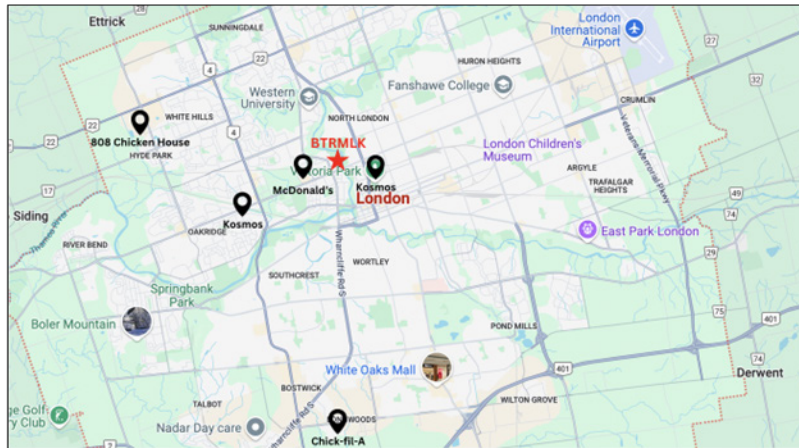


EXHIBIT #4

BTRMLK's Fried Chicken



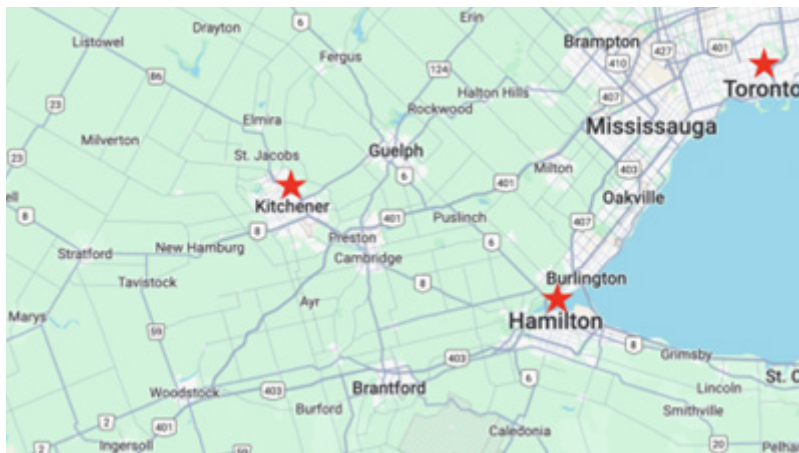
**EXHIBIT #5**

**BTRMLK Prices And Costs**

Item	Selling Price	Percentage of Sales	Variable Cost
Chicken Sandwich	\$ 13	50%	30%
Chicken Strips	\$ 12	26%	30%
Deluxe Fries	\$ 11	8%	25%
Deluxe Mac & Cheese	\$ 12	11%	25%
Sides	\$ 5	5%	10%

**EXHIBIT #6**

**Southern Ontario Map With University Cities**



## EXHIBIT #7

## Promotion Options

Option	Investment	Impressions	Conversion Rate
Facebook <sup>30</sup>	\$ 0.0072 per impression	N/A	0.5%
Instagram	\$ 0.008 per impression	N/A	0.2%
TikTok	\$ 0.001 per impression	N/A	0.75%
Flyer	\$ 0.192 per piece <sup>31</sup>	N/A	2.5%
Poster: TTC	\$ 2,000 per ad <sup>32</sup>	200,000 <sup>33</sup>	1%
Poster: LTC	\$500 per ad <sup>34</sup>	30,000	0.5%

[30] (March 2025), "How much does social media advertising cost?," *Nutshell*, <https://www.nutshell.com/blog/cost-of-social-advertising>.

[31] "Flyer printing, custom business flyers," *Vistaprint*, [https://www.vistaprint.ca/marketing-materials/flyers?srsltid=AfmBOoqIfB7YjL\\_Wz2b-7bSgHCNblLrCtreEQKEZxBWuRN6w4z3GRS2l](https://www.vistaprint.ca/marketing-materials/flyers?srsltid=AfmBOoqIfB7YjL_Wz2b-7bSgHCNblLrCtreEQKEZxBWuRN6w4z3GRS2l).

[32] "This is how much it costs to advertise on the TTC," *blogTO*, [https://www.blogto.com/city/2010/10/ever\\_wondered\\_what\\_it\\_costs\\_to\\_advertise\\_on\\_the\\_ttc/](https://www.blogto.com/city/2010/10/ever_wondered_what_it_costs_to_advertise_on_the_ttc/).

[33] "Toronto transit commission," *City of Toronto*, [https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/city-administration/city-managers-office/agencies-corporations/agencies/toronto-transit-commission/#:~:text=The%20Toronto%20Transit%20Commission%20\(TTC,third%2Dlargest%20in%20North%20America](https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/city-administration/city-managers-office/agencies-corporations/agencies/toronto-transit-commission/#:~:text=The%20Toronto%20Transit%20Commission%20(TTC,third%2Dlargest%20in%20North%20America)

[34] "Bus advertising cost vs car wraps: who's really getting the best deal?," *Carvertise*, <https://carvertise.com/bus-advertising-cost/#:~:text=Aver-age%20Bus%20Advertising%20Cost&text=On%20average>.