

# Potato chips in Canada - All Dressed Up

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If you want to try potato chips with ketchup, dill pickle flavor or seasoned with all you can think of - at the same time! - Canada is the perfect place for your next visit. **The US might hold the biggest share** of the Canadian potato chips market, thanks to greater volumes and a larger distribution network, but domestic manufacturers are not to be underestimated. Some of them also distribute their products across the border and are bringing Americans distinctive tastes that they can't get at home.

Three of the five most popular potato chips brands in Canada belong to the American company Frito-Lay, the snack food division of **PepsiCo**. The global brands Lay's and Ruffles rule the Canadian market and one brand with Canadian origins, Miss Vickie, holds fourth place, according to Euromonitor.

**Lay's** is the most popular brand in North America and is steadily conquering other markets across the globe. As for the design of the package, it relies on its fame and doesn't have to "explain" itself on every bag. The bright yellow bag, with an illustration of a sliced potato in the middle and a big logotype above it, has become widely recognized and is a trailblazer for other potato chips brands. While the Original flavor has a signature yellow color, other flavors share a nice palette of varied, subtle colors appropriate for the tastes they illustrate. Clearly, the packaging for the newest additions, such as new flavors, or different shaped chips, can't be designed exactly the same and needs more detail. For instance, the finalists of this year's "Do Us A Flavour" competition are packaged in color-coded bags with white space in the middle of the front, where all the details are placed.

"Do Us A Flavour" is a yearly contest in which members of the public propose a new taste. The company chooses a selection of the best flavors, which are produced and sold for a limited time. Customers then choose a winning flavor, which is sold alongside the regular flavors for the next year. Including the consumers in deciding next year's goals is a great marketing move. Especially now, as social media is becoming the first channel to "consult" when searching for new ideas and feedback from consumers.

Voting for this year's "[Do Us A Flavour](#)" winner finished at the end of September. Four finalists in Canada proposed pretty strong tastes - **Wavy Ondulees Cowboy BBQ Beans, Butter Chicken, Montreal Smoked Meat** and **P.E.I. Scalloped Potatoes**. This year's theme was "Tastes Of Canada" from one of four Canadian regions.

Since its beginning, Lay's has used advertising to increase sales. It was the first snack food manufacturer to purchase television commercials. The slogan from a series of ads, "Betcha can't eat just one", by Young & Rubicam, is one of the best-known slogans in advertising and was active until 1992, when it became "Too good to eat just one". The first one still sounds more effective!

In the same year, the **Ruffles** slogan "Ruffles has ridges" was replaced with "Get your own bag". Both slogans, for Lay's and Ruffles, were created by the BBDO advertising company. Frito-Lay is the pioneer of snack food advertising, by packaging chips in sealed bags and offering a ridged variation very early on. These were introduced in 1958 and are much better for dipping because they are thicker and sturdier and harder to accidentally break.

Original Ruffles varieties share a "ridged" background, made from two shades of blue, with a big red logotype in the same style. The middle of the package is reserved for additional information, with an illustration of the chips on a white background framed with colored ribbons bearing the name of the flavor. The Ruffles brand originates from the US, but one flavor made just for the Canadian market became so popular and high in demand that the United States wants to share it with its own consumers. Dana Lawrence, Senior Director of Marketing at Frito-Lay,

described that popularity: "To say **Ruffles All Dressed** has a cult following in Canada is like saying it sometimes snows there a little". For a limited time, Ruffles All Dressed will be also available in the United States.

Lay's in Canada was launched in 1996, when the Frito-Lay company decided to rebrand a Canadian potato chips brand that it had acquired a couple of years previously - the **Hostess**. It was the leading potato chips brand in the country until the 1990s, but with the introduction of more upscale brands such as Kettle Chips and Miss Vickie's, its popularity started to rapidly decline.

**Miss Vickie's** is the last of the three most popular PepsiCo brands in Canada. It was first introduced in 1987 at the annual Alliston Potato Festival and was immediately sold out. The brand was born. Initially made by Canadians Vickie and Bill Kerr, the brand was acquired by Frito-Lay in 1993. The first Miss Vickie's package was designed by Miss Vickie herself. She wanted people to know that a woman made the product, so she used a lace collar and a bow as the illustration. To show that the recipe and the ingredients were home-made, she also included a drawing of a farm.

Through the years, the original design has gone through some changes. The collar is still here, but all the other graphic elements are gone. Currently they are offering five different flavors and each taste has a different color. All the bags have a lot of empty space on them and communicate their image mainly through the distinctive white collar and color. Illustrations of the flavors are put in very small medallions.

**Old Dutch Foods** started as a small po-

tato chips factory in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and over the years grew into the owner of the third most popular chips brand in the Canadian market, Old Dutch. The company was founded in 1934, and the chips production started in 1954. They have a very large portfolio of potato chips varieties and flavors. All their products can be recognized by the company trademark of a Dutch windmill. Their package design differs from the competition. While others use bag color to differentiate the flavors, this brand uses white as the background color for the whole basic range, and adds different stripes of color for distinction. At the same time, on the margins of the bag, the yellow color bordering the red lettering is repeated. The result is different color combinations, such as strong black or light beige, that look minimal but have quite a contrasting quality. With this design choice, they have managed to keep the whole range uniform and still keep the distinctive feel of every taste.

The last of the "big five" potato chips brands in Canada is **Kettle Chips**, a brand owned by **Diamond Foods**, an American packaged food company based in California. The Kettle Brand founder started selling natural foods from a van in 1978; the brand was introduced in 1982, and was acquired by Diamond Foods in 2010. These chips are made with all natural ingredients and they are gluten-, GMO- and trans-fat-free. The brand's commitment to the environment can even be seen on their packages. They have removed the paper layer from their potato chips bags, thereby reducing the material used by 20 per cent. If we remember that they produce and package large quantities of potato chips, that's quite a lot of trees saved. The whole visual identity of this brand

matches their core values. Unlike the majority of snack brands, Kettle Chips doesn't use red or yellow color combinations, which are the most aggressive and, therefore, widely applied. They use warm, brown colors, which evoke the color of the land. The texture of the letters reminds us of potatoes and the serif typography sends us back to older, healthier times. The Kettle brand potato chips range has a very elaborate color palette and all the shades are slightly muted to look "natural". The other chips ranges in their portfolio are even closer to the core color and all of them use only one tone of brown for the base.

There are many other potato chips manufacturers in the Canadian market. Bigger, smaller; older, younger; well-branded, and less so. There are two smaller brands included in this review as an example that a company can grow their consumer base "only" with decent branding, good package design, and by sharing the story behind the product. The first brand, **Hardbite** handcrafted-style chips, is owned by local BC potato farmers, Pete Schouten and Wes Heppells. In 2005, after a blind taste test by the National Post, these chips were named "the best gourmet chip in Canada". Today they can be found in the US and even in Asia. The whole brand image revolves around the owners' love of outdoor activities and it is branded in a masculine, rough manner – a black background with the central position of the bag reserved for photographs that show numerous outdoor activities, such as camping, skiing or cycling. The branding was created by CREW Marketing Partners and all photographs used by the brand feature popular destinations on the Canadian West Coast. The same marketing company is responsible for

other promotional activities, such as photo contests and sampling. With their help, sales have grown by an amazing 50 per cent.

The other bright example of smart use of storytelling, design and packaging is **Covered Bridge Potato Chips**. The Albright family started to grow potatoes in the early 1900s and began selling their potatoes to the chips manufacturers. In 2009, when the fourth generation took over the business, they decided it was time to start their own brand. They built a name around the local attraction, the longest covered bridge in the world, situated in Hartland, New Brunswick. With a name that links them to an already well-known place, they decided to be more playful with the design of the bag. The packaging design is based on flat colored comic art. The whole range, currently offering 12 different seasonings, shares a background texture that was made with two-toned wavy stripes. The illustrations are funny and eye-catching, especially the popular Lobster and Creamy Dill Pickle flavors.

At first glance, it seems that smaller challengers are much braver than the big international players who dictate the trends. When we look at the branding, packaging and communication of successful smaller brands, we see that they are emphasizing their roots, using strong, bold design to tell a story and communicating with their followers in a more direct way. The majority of larger, international brands may have started the same, but in a different time, when there was no social media and the brand reach was much smaller. Today, with facilities in every part of the world and enormous distribution networks, they choose to work with the biggest marketing and advertising agencies, who



can follow their demands. As a result, their package design is made in a way that is not offensive to anyone and can be "read" the same in all markets. The investments are huge and it is better to play safe when going into massive re-designs.

Smaller manufacturers can use their size for their own advantage and present themselves in a more intimate way. If they decide to choose the style of the visual and other communication according to their personal preferences, they are on the right track to reach the type of consumers who share the same values. That way, they are not only forming their customer base, they are turning their consumers into brand advocates, who will help them in the long haul.

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### Canadian Lay's Do Us a Flavour finalist flavours

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## Ruffles All Dressed and ready to impress

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## Made and designed by a woman - Miss Vickie's potato chips

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White and strippy Old Dutch potato chips bag



All natural Kettle Brand doesn't use paper on its bags to save the trees

Covered Bridge - designed to put a smile on your face





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