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Where do Canadians like to eat?

BrandSpark International surveys 6,000 Canadians about their favourite restaurants and new menu items

TORONTO, Oct. 2, 2014 /CNW/ - Where do Canadians like to eat and how are their dining habits shaping the country?

BrandSpark International conducted a national survey of more than 6,000 Canadians about which quick service restaurants (QSRs) and which full service restaurants (FSRs) they frequent and how their dining habits are shaping the country and restaurant menus. The results were announced today in the first ever BrandSpark Best Restaurant Awards that identify Canadians' favourite quick and full service restaurants. Highlights include an intensifying coffee war, Canadians seeking healthy food items that don't sacrifice taste, and an increased demand for high quality ingredients. In addition to the Best Restaurant Awards, the company also announced the winners of the companion Best New Menu Items Awards.

Canadians want "health without sacrifice"

"Many restaurants are hesitant to launch healthy menu items. Even though Canadians say they want to eat healthier, once they enter the restaurant they often don't actually make healthier choices," said Denis Hancock, Director of Consumer Insights at BrandSpark International. "This is interesting as it underscores the difference between good food and healthy food. Canadians might make healthy food when eating at home, but they often treat themselves when dining out.

"That said, one trend that BrandSpark still expects to see with restaurants over the coming months is menu items that are 'healthy without sacrifice' – items that still taste great and include premium ingredients." This is the case with one of the most notable winners from the Best New Menu Item Awards, Extreme Pita's Spring Fever Pita.

Canada's coffee war continues to brew

For their basic cup of joe, more than 50% of Canadians named Tim Horton's "Best-Tasting Coffee," while McDonald's came in second place with 29% of Canadians. When it comes to specialty coffees, Tim Horton's and Starbucks tied in the Best New Menu Item Awards' "Latte" category overall, with Tim Horton's Chocolate Dream Latte winning top honours in the "Best New Specialty Hot Beverage" category.

"Tim Horton's winning Canada's best tasting coffee was no surprise, but McDonald's coming in a very strong second place versus more established coffee brands like Starbucks is impressive," said Hancock. "This clearly demonstrates what a great job McDonald's has done to improve and market their coffee over the last few years. Similarly, Tim Horton's strong performance in the latte categories points towards these three heavyweights slugging it out in the future."

A better burger movement is on Canada's horizon

For the traditional beef burger approximately 30% of Canadians named A&W as delivering the "Best-Tasting Burger" in Canada, making it the category winner in a category with many competitors. "A&W has done a great job elevating their burger quality perceptions over the years," added Hancock, "but this year they've really raised the bar by communicating their quality promise with advertisements discussing their hormone-free beef. The strategy is clearly paying off for them. It will be very interesting to see how far traditional fast food restaurants take this 'better burger movement' – particularly when you factor the balance between time and expense that goes into making quality burgers versus the low price and quick service combination consumers are accustomed to."

BrandSpark, the research company behind Canada's most credible consumer packaged goods (CPG) awards program, the Best New Product Awards, brings their ten years of gleaning insights from Canadians in the CPG industry to Canada's restaurant business.

"We wanted to leverage our expertise in Canadian consumer insights in the CPG category to Canada's QSR and FSR industries," added Hancock. The Best New Restaurant and Best New Menu Item survey was administered online, with more than 6,000 Canadians participating.

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

BrandSpark International

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Select BrandSpark Best Restaurant Award Winners*		
Category	Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) Winner(s)	Full Service Restaurant (FSR) Winner(s)

Favourite Restaurant	McDonald's	The Keg
Best-Tasting Coffee	Tim Horton's	<i>Not applicable</i>
Best-Tasting Burger	A&W	<i>Not applicable</i>
Best for Breakfast	McDonald's tied with Tim Horton's	Coras
Best for Lunch	McDonald's tied with Subway	Swiss Chalet tied with Boston Pizza
Best for Dinner	McDonald's tied with Wendy's	The Keg
Best for families with kids	McDonald's	Boston Pizza

*For a complete list of BrandSpark Best Restaurant Award Winners, please visit www.BestRestaurantAwards.com.

In addition to the Best Restaurant Awards, the study gathered insights about topics ranging from why particular restaurants were selected as favourites, how restaurants can continue introducing winning innovation, and the different ethnic flavour profiles consumers are most interested in trying at restaurants.

As a companion to BrandSpark's Best Restaurant Awards, the company also surveyed Canadians about their favourite Best New Menu Items.

Select Best New Menu Item Awards**		
Category	Menu Item	Winner
Pita Wrap	Spring Fever Pita	Extreme Pita
Specialty Hot Beverage	Chocolate Dream Latte	Tim Horton's
Chicken Turkey Burger	Tuscan Chicken Ciabatta	Wendy's
Hot & Spicy	Chipotle Whopper	Burger King

**For a complete list of Best New Menu Item Award Winners, please visit www.BestRestaurantAwards.com.

About BrandSpark International:

BrandSpark International is a leading brand, marketing and product innovation insights firm. Its comprehensive and innovative research approaches get at the heart of **HOW** consumers think, **WHY** they act the way they do, and **WHAT** companies need to do about it to grow their business.

BrandSpark has been helping restaurant brands grow for over 15 years.

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For further information: For more information about the BrandSpark Restaurant Awards, how to leverage the insights and credential from this unique study and program, please contact: BrandSpark International, Denis Hancock, Director of Consumer Insights, dhancock@brandspark.com or 647-727-4580; Mark Baltazar, Vice President & Partner, mbaltazar@brandspark.com; For interview requests, please contact: Jefferson Darrell & Associates (JDA) at JDA@JeffersonDarrell.com

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