Brand Doctor

Brand Check-up

Hudson’s Bay

As of July 8, 2025

Status: Flatlined

Hudson’s Bay kept its fame but lost its reason to visit, starving its stores while leaning on real estate and debt until the cash ran out.

About this check-up

Brand Doctor reviews well-known brands the way we review a client’s marketing: symptoms, diagnosis, treatment. This check-up uses public information available on July 8, 2025. It is brand and marketing analysis, not investment advice. Sources are listed at the end.

Vital signs

Share price

CAD, at the dates shown [10, 12, 13, 14]



Take-private price

C$11.00

Cash paid per share when the take-private closed, March 3, 2020; a deal price, not a market close. No listed shares since [14]

Take-private vs IPO price

Down 35%

C$11.00 take-private price vs C$17.00 IPO offering price, November 2012 [10, 14]

Latest annual result

C$329.7M net loss

12 months to Jan. 31, 2025; no stand-alone Canadian financial statements prepared [1]

Secured debt at filing

C$1.13B

About $1,129.4 million as of March 7, 2025 [1]

Stores at filing

96

80 Hudson's Bay, 3 Saks Fifth Avenue, 13 Saks OFF 5th; all closed by June 1, 2025 [1, 6]

Brand IP sale

C$30.0M

Name, coat of arms and stripes to Canadian Tire; court-approved June 3, 2025 [5, 7, 8]

Timeline

1670	Hudson’s Bay is founded; in 2025 it describes itself in court as the oldest company in North America. [2]
2008-07	Richard Baker’s NRDC Equity Partners buys HBC. [11]
2012-11	HBC returns to the TSX at $17.00 a share, raising $365 million. [10]
2013-07	HBC announces a US$2.9 billion deal for Saks Inc. [11]
2015-06	HBC agrees to buy Galeria Kaufhof and its Belgian subsidiary Inno from Metro in a deal valued at €2.825 billion, including the assumption of certain liabilities. [3]
2020-03	Baker’s group completes the take-private at $11.00 a share and HBC leaves the TSX. [14]
2024-07	The parent agrees to buy Neiman Marcus for US$2.65 billion and form Saks Global; Hudson’s Bay is to be recapitalized separately. [15]
2025-03	Hudson’s Bay files for CCAA protection on March 7; liquidation starts March 24 at all but six of 96 stores. [1, 5]
2025-05	Canadian Tire agrees to buy the Hudson’s Bay name, coat of arms and stripes for about $30 million. [7, 5]
2025-06	The last stores close to the public on June 1; the court approves the Canadian Tire sale on June 3. [6, 8]

Symptoms

- Sales fell more than 30% year over year even as gross margins improved.
- A net loss of about $329.7 million in the 12 months to January 31, 2025.
- Some critical trade creditors went unpaid and some payments were deferred for many months before the filing.
- Shares hit a record-low close of $6.37 on June 7, 2019, about 63% below the IPO price.

- Downtown flagships lost the office workers and commuters they relied on.

Diagnosis

1 No clear reason to visit

Analysts said the Bay lost both its low-end and upper-end shoppers, as Winners and Marshalls won on value and brands such as Aritzia and Sephora won on experience. One said the company had no real clear strategy for about a decade, and there was no compelling reason to come into a store. [4]

2 Money went online while stores went stale

The company put about $130 million into e-commerce in 2021 and 2022, and its own affidavit says the strategy did not yield the anticipated financial returns and led to underinvestment in physical stores. Later changes to merchandise and promotions improved gross margins, but sales fell more than 30% year over year. [2]

3 Deals and real estate ahead of customers

Ownership moved from NRDC in 2008 to the TSX in 2012, then through the Saks and Kaufhof deals and a 2020 take-private at $11.00 a share. The 2024 Neiman Marcus deal put the U.S. stores in Saks Global and left the Canadian business financed on its own. At filing it had about $1.13 billion in secured debt, including about $724.4 million of mortgage debt, and every store was leased. [11, 14, 15, 1, 2]

4 Downtown flagships lost their crowd

Canadian department stores faced some of the strictest and longest pandemic restrictions, and remote work then cut traffic at downtown flagships that relied on office workers and commuters and were among the company's highest-cost stores. Nordstrom's exit added price pressure, and the 2025 trade dispute made it harder to raise financing or sell real estate. [2]

Prognosis

As of July 8, 2025, Hudson’s Bay has no stores and no operating business. The CCAA process continues under the court-appointed monitor, which is selling what remains. Canadian Tire has bought the name, coat of arms and stripes in a court-approved sale. Landlords for 23 of the 25 leases Ruby Liu still wants have refused consent. We are watching three things: how Canadian Tire uses the stripes, whether any former Bay space reopens as a department store, and what former employees recover from the process.

Treatment

- Pick one core customer and one price position, then cut assortment and floor space to match.
- Fund store basics, staff and service before large digital projects that cannot show a return.
- Make lease and real-estate decisions serve the retail brand, not short-term cash needs.
- As the new owner, Canadian Tire should use the stripes and coat of arms with restraint and consistency so they keep their meaning.

Lessons for growing companies

Give people a reason to visit

Fame does not bring shoppers through the door. Decide which customer you serve and what they get from you that they cannot get from a discounter or from the brand itself.

Fund the core experience first

Hudson’s Bay spent about $130 million on e-commerce and let its stores slide. Protect spending on the experience most of your customers still use.

Distinctive assets hold value

The stripes and coat of arms drew a deal worth about $30 million as the stores closed. Build consistent assets and keep them, because they outlast campaigns and owners.

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About Brand Doctor

Brand Doctor is a marketing strategy consultancy founded by Cliff K. F. Lin. He has spent 17 years in marketing and managed more than $30 million in spend for SaaS, tech and lead-generation companies.

A Brand Check-up applies the method we use with clients to a well-known brand: the symptoms you can see from outside, the root causes behind them, and the treatment we would prescribe. For your own company, we look at six areas (positioning, messaging, customer journey, channel mix, budget and spend, and measurement) and rank what to fix first.

$30M+	135+	8×	17
In marketing spend managed	Campaigns treated	Growth achieved	Years in marketing

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