

CASE STUDY

YU Eats

Campus Dining Brand Identity

York University x Chartwells Canada

2022

Project Overview

THE BRIEF

York University, Canada's third-largest university with 55,000+ students, issued an RFP for a complete overhaul of their campus food services. Chartwells Canada needed a compelling brand identity to anchor their pitch—one that would resonate with Gen Z students while representing the diversity and vibrancy of the York community.

The challenge: Create a dining brand that feels fresh and youthful without being gimmicky, differentiated from typical campus food branding, and built to last beyond a single trend cycle.

PROJECT DETAILS

CLIENT	York University / Chartwells Canada
ROLE	Lead Designer (Sole Creative)
TIMELINE	4 weeks (April 2022)
OUTCOME	Contract won — Live since Fall 2022
SCALE	55,000+ students, 70+ dining locations

DELIVERABLES

- YU Eats master brand identity (logo, typography, color system)
- 416 Burger Co. sub-brand identity
- Mobile app UI concepts
- Environmental graphics & wayfinding
- Promotional campaign materials
- RFP presentation collateral

The Challenge

DESIGNING FOR GEN Z WITHOUT DATING YOURSELF

The core tension: How do you create a brand that feels relevant to 18-24 year olds without relying on aesthetic trends that will feel stale in 12 months?

York's student body is one of the most diverse in Canada—over 10,000 international students from 178 countries. The brand needed to feel inclusive and representative, not like it was designed for a specific demographic.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Fun, not silly

Playful typography and bold colors that feel energetic without being cartoonish

Youthful, not young

A visual language that respects students as adults, not teenagers

Timeless energy

Strong graphic foundations that can evolve without complete redesign

THE STRATEGIC APPROACH

Rather than chasing Gen Z trends (Y2K nostalgia, maximalist chaos, AI-generated aesthetics), I anchored the brand in York's existing equity: the bold red, the strong geometric "Y" and "U" letterforms, and the university's reputation as a socially conscious, community-driven institution.

The result is a brand that feels unmistakably "York" while bringing fresh energy to campus dining—the kind of identity students can feel ownership over because it reflects their school, not a trend they'll scroll past in six months.

Brand Identity: YU Eats

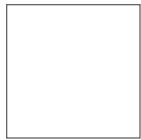


The YU Eats wordmark leverages the natural connection between "York University" and the brand name—the Y and U letterforms become both a name and an address to the student: "You Eat." The repeating pattern creates texture and energy while the bold red establishes immediate recognition across campus.

COLOR PALETTE



York Red
#E31837



White
#FFFFFF



Charcoal
#2D2D2D

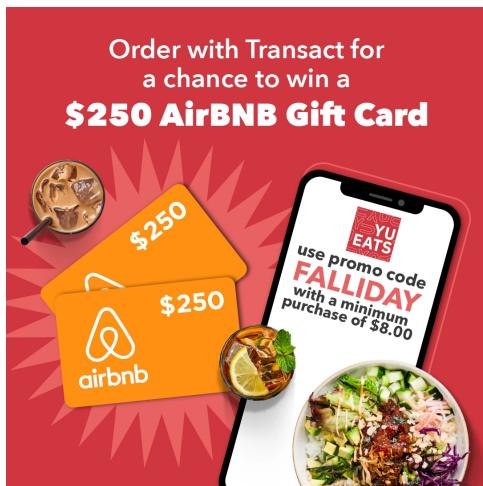
DESIGN RATIONALE

The repeating "YU" pattern in the background serves multiple purposes: it creates visual texture that can scale from app icons to building murals, it reinforces brand recognition through repetition, and it creates a sense of community and belonging—this is YOUR dining experience.

Brand in Action: Digital



The YU Eats mobile ordering platform extends the brand into students' daily lives. The app maintains the bold red and clean typography while adding functional UI elements that prioritize speed and ease of use—critical for students ordering between classes.



Brand in Action: Environmental



The brand pattern translates powerfully to large-scale environmental graphics. Wall murals at dining locations create Instagram-worthy moments while reinforcing brand presence across campus. The repeating pattern works at any scale—from napkins to building-sized installations.



Sub-brand: 416 Burger Co.

York's RFP specifically requested unique, differentiated food brands that would compete with off-campus options. 416 Burger Co. references Toronto's area code, creating immediate local relevance while establishing its own playful identity distinct from the parent YU Eats brand.



DESIGN APPROACH

The 416 Burger Co. identity takes a more playful, irreverent tone—"Keep on Grillin' Baby" and "Oh How Bun-derful" speak to Gen Z's appreciation for puns and self-aware humor. The bold color blocks and retro-inspired typography create a distinct personality while the burger photography drives appetite appeal.

Results & Impact

CHARTWELLS WON THE CONTRACT

The brand identity played a key role in differentiating Chartwells' proposal from competitors. York University selected Chartwells as their food services partner, and the YU Eats brand launched across campus in Fall 2022.

55,000+

Students served daily

70+

Dining locations on campus

3+ YEARS AND COUNTING

Contract renewed — brand still in market

WHAT THIS PROJECT DEMONSTRATES

- Brand strategy that balances trend-awareness with longevity
- Ability to create cohesive multi-brand systems
- Environmental and digital design that scales across touchpoints
- Work that wins business and stays in market

Thank You

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