

Doing Business in Quebec:

*A resource guide developed by
LAT Multilingual*

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Introduction to Quebec	2
Business Registration and Naming	3
Language of Work, Commerce and Business	3
Business Websites	3
Bilingual Signage	3
Bilingual Packaging	4
Commercial Documentation & Advertising	4
Hyperlinks	6
Companies with 50+ employees	6

Introduction to Quebec

With a population of over 8.4 million people (2019), Quebec is the second most populated province in Canada, second only to Ontario. It is also the only province to have a predominantly French-speaking population, with French as the sole provincial official language.

Quebec is often perceived as a somewhat difficult market for companies to expand into from elsewhere. This is largely due to the complex language regulations in the province which detail requirements around using French for business names, signage, labeling, workplace communications and more. However, there are also cultural nuances at play that impact how products and services are received in Quebec, compared to elsewhere in Canada.

Law 101, also known as The Charter of the French Language (French: La charte de la langue française), is a 1977 law in the province of Quebec defining French as the official language of Quebec. Any person or company of any size that sells products or services in Quebec must follow Law 101.

The Quebec Board of the French Language (office québécois de la langue française or OQLF) is the government agency responsible for defining and enforcing Quebec policy on linguistic officialization, terminology and francization. Its mandate is to see that French is the everyday language of work, communication, commerce and business.

The OQLF has regulations that apply to public and commercial signage, product labelling, games and software, names of enterprises, sales literature, and all client and customer communications.

We have prepared this resource guide to help you navigate the requirements of doing business in Quebec. Most of what you will read here is from the OQLF's official website and subsections.

Please note: There are many requirements and pieces of legislation that govern how business must be conducted in Quebec and it is not possible to address them all in this document. LAT cannot assume responsibility for problems, errors or omissions arising from using this guide.



Business Registration and Naming

The first step to doing business in Quebec is to file the appropriate registration documents and ensure your business name complies with regulations. A company may use the English version of its name, but is required to have a **French version or French tagline** when registering and anywhere the name is displayed in Quebec. For example – Tim Hortons added “toujours frais” to their Quebec name and signage.

Language of Work, Commerce & Business

Given workers' right to perform their work in French, Law 101 states that, regardless of their size, enterprises doing business in Quebec must use French, particularly in staff communications, such as:

- job or promotion offers
- job applications
- internal and external communications
- computer technology - including computer programs, software, company websites and company internal networks
- work documents, reference manuals, catalogues and forms
- work tools and equipment
- during meetings and training
- collective agreements
- All other written communications by the employer, which are intended for personnel (directives, announcements, pay slips)

Businesses may provide these documents in another language, as long as they are also available in French. Employees can speak and write in French and ask for French work documents and tools, including computer software.

Workers also can't be fired or refused a job just because they don't know English or another language well enough. The only exception is if the job has to be done in another language. An example is a call centre job that involves talking to people in the United States on a regular basis.

Law 101 says that every person in Quebec has the right to be served in French, so workers who deal with the public have to know French well enough to communicate with the public in French.

Anything written on a product sold in Quebec, or in documents included with the product (for example, instructions and warranties) must be in French. Translations in one or more other languages can be included with the French.

Business Websites

A business must have a French version of its website if it:

- has an address in Quebec, and
- sells its products or services to Quebecers

If a business uses its website for selling products or services to Quebec consumers over the Internet, all the information that a consumer needs to make a purchase must be in French. This includes information about the product or service, order forms, invoices and receipts. English or another language can be used as long as a French version is available.

Bilingual Signage

Rules surrounding French wording on signage were put in place in 2016 and all businesses were required to be following them by November 2019. The regulations specify that there must be a sufficient presence of French on signs and posters. The rules **do not** require that non-French trademarks be translated into French – just that they must have a “sufficient presence of French” on the sign or nearby.

Under the regulations, businesses with a trademark name that is not in French would be required to add a French word, description or slogan to their signage. For example, “Second Cup” in Quebec is “Les Cafés Second Cup”.



The “sufficient presence of French” requirement can be fulfilled by adding a sign or poster that includes:

- a French generic term or a description of the products or services concerned;
- a French slogan; or
- other information in French about the products or services offered to consumers or persons frequenting the business. Note: this does not include items such as business hours and addresses).

The regulations do not require the additional French on signs to be predominant over the non-French sign, or even that it be the same size. However, the French signs must have **permanent visibility that is similar to that of the trademark displayed, and must use the same materials and lighting as the non-French sign.**

The terms ‘public’ and ‘commercial’ signage apply to all messages displayed in a public place, whether in the form of a brand name, notice, sign, or text displayed temporarily on a billboard or in a window.

There are some notable exceptions:

- Commercial advertising displayed in the subway, on buses, in bus shelters, and on billboards must be written in French only.
- Public signs and posters concerning health or public safety must be written in French, but another language may also be used, provided that French appears at least as prominently.
- Public signage posted by museums, botanical gardens or zoos, cultural and scientific exhibitions, as well as public signage and advertising for events whose participants come for the most part from outside Quebec, must be written in French, but another language may also be used, provided that French appears at least as prominently.
- Public signs and commercial advertising for cultural or educational activities or products that are not in French or that come from a news media source that does not publish or broadcast in French may be written solely in a language other than French.

In Quebec, the OQLF receives approximately 3,000 complaints a year. One-third of these complaints relate to commercial signage, for which fines for non-compliance range from CA\$1,500 to \$20,000.

Bilingual Packaging

Product packages and labels must all be bilingual. This includes text that appears directly on products, on their containers and packaging, and the documents that accompany products, such as manuals, operating instructions, warranty certificates, etc. [Download our useful resource on labelling.](#)

Commercial Documentation & Advertising

Sales literature distributed in Quebec must be written in French. This rule extends in particular to advertising copy in print and electronic formats, such as:

- catalogues
- brochures
- folders
- commercial directories
- commercial messages on the websites of companies that do business in Quebec.

This also applies to:

- purchase orders
- invoices
- receipts submitted to customers and suppliers.

In all of these cases, it is possible to use other languages in addition to French, but the French text must be displayed at least as prominently as every other language.

Law 101 does stipulate certain situations where languages other than French may be used exclusively. The same goes for printed matter aimed at ethnic groups published in the language of those groups or in publications concerning an activity or cultural or educational product in another language.

Social Media

Even though Law 101 was adopted before social media came into existence, social media must still respect the regulations of the Charter, in the same way that a website must.

Business social media networks must respect the Charter if the:

- business is established in Quebec;
- social media outlet is officially used and advertised by the business; and
- the social media content targets the Quebec market.

This applies to sales, promotions, videos and job postings. In summary, if you're using social media to sell or promote a product or service, it must be in French.

You have two options:

1. Make a bilingual social media page, or
2. Make two separate social media pages (one French, one in your source language).

Note: The French translation **MUST** be comprehensible and coherent to a native French speaker. This means no using free translation software! Quebecers pick up on inconsistencies and a failure to recognize local nuances.

If a client or other netizen comments or asks a question in French, then you must respond in French. Any other language than the one originally used by the commenter is considered an infraction.

Another quick tip: It's common for companies to post about holidays and cultural observations on social media. Be aware that Quebec has many holidays that are different from the rest of Canada. For example, on May 18th Quebec residents celebrate National Patriot's Day while the rest of Canada is celebrating Victoria Day.

Social Media Outlet	Account Language Settings	Account Posting Language (on user's personal computer)	Platform Fancization Limits
Facebook	French (Canada)	Data	Ads Automatically generated English terms Facebook apps
Twitter	French	Data	Automatically generated English terms User posts
YouTube	French (Canada)	Data	Automatically generated English terms
LinkedIn	French	French (Canada)	Ads Automatically generated English terms
Instagram	Depends on the mobile device language settings Most smartphones and tablets offer French (Canada) option.		Automatically generated English terms
Pinterest	Depends on the mobile device language settings Most smartphones and tablets offer French (Canada) option.		Automatically generated English terms

Hyperlinks

When linking from the French version of your website, you must be sure to link to your French social media networks.

Some hyperlinks come with a call to action such as 'follow us on Instagram'; if so, the call to action must be in French (e.g. 'suivez-nous sur Instagram'). If there isn't one available, then you may only use the icon/image for that platform.

Companies with 50+ employees

Businesses with 50 or more employees must follow special rules to make sure French is the usual language of work. These rules are called "francization."

Businesses with more than 50 employees are required to register with the OQLF in order to become eligible for a francization certificate, which is granted if the linguistic requirements are met. If not, employers are required to adopt a francization programme, which includes having employees, especially ones in managerial positions, who do not speak French or are met. If not, employers are required to adopt a francization programme, which includes having employees, especially ones in managerial positions, who do not speak French or whose grasp of French is weak, attend French language training. The francization program includes the total number of employees who

are located in Quebec, even those who may be in different locations within the province.

Large enterprises employing 100 people or more must establish a francization committee consisting in equal parts of employer representatives and workers to oversee all francization efforts.

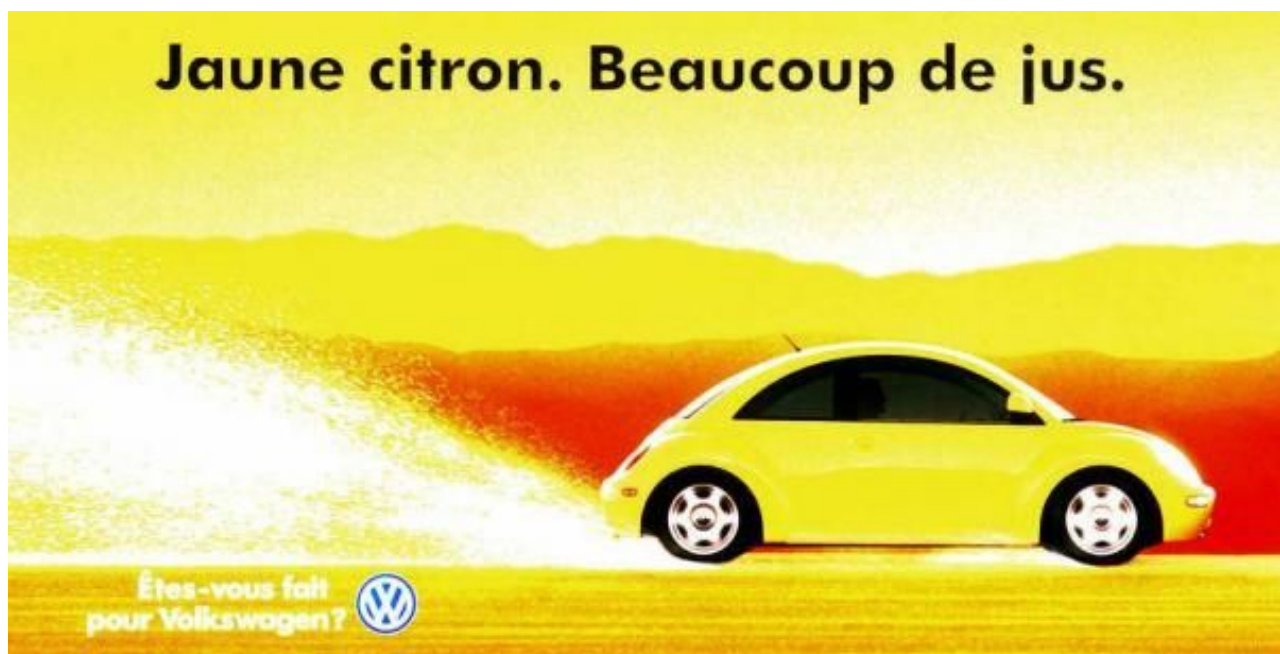
It is important to note that these requirements do not have to be met on day one. They may be implemented gradually.

Marketing to a Quebec audience

It pays to understand the market that you're selling into. Quebecers take great pride in their heritage and culture. They are also very brand loyal compared to the rest of Canada, and are far less welcoming of things that are considered 'foreign'.

Take for instance, Target's very public failure in Quebec. This was largely due to them not understanding their Quebecois consumer, who prefers to shop at the individual épiceries, boulangeries and fromageries, rather than have everything available in one place. Target's "one-stop shop" style simply didn't fit with the Quebecois way of life.

On the other hand, a recently opened Starbucks Express in Montreal tailored its menu specifically to their Quebec audience, featuring some of the most popular menu items in the Quebec market. The store, set in a commuter hub, was designed to provide a



faster speed of service, which is ideal for morning commuters.

Volkswagen also localized their message when they expanded into Quebec so that it resonated with the local audience. Rather than translate its “Drivers Wanted” slogan into French, VW chose a new one that engaged with recreation-loving francophone car buyers: “Êtes-vous fait pour Volkswagen?”, which means “Are you meant for a Volkswagen lifestyle?” (Source: strategyonline.ca).

One brand that has also seen success in Quebec is Home Depot. In 2011, 12 years after launching in the province, the retailer was having trouble connecting with consumers. It was stuck in third place behind homegrown stores Rona and Reno Depot.

Home Depot decided to create 120 videos, which were filmed discussions with customers talking about their needs, and then encouraged them to share the videos through social media and TV. This allowed for the brand to present itself in a local voice. That year, in-store visits rose 43% compared to the year before; sales increased more than 30%, and Home Depot moved into second place in Quebec.

In summary, Quebec customers are much more likely to adopt a brand, buy a product, or follow a company's activities on social media if the company demonstrates an understanding of Quebec's society and culture.

Adapt your identity

When expanding into Quebec, sometimes a more dramatic change can be beneficial for marketing to this particular audience. Take, for example, the case of The Running Room. CEO and founder John Stanton says, “When you expand into Quebec, there are two things you have to understand. First, you’re going to have to become a fully bilingual company. And second, you may have to change your logo and perhaps even your name. The last part, for us, was a pretty dramatic thing to do; we really had to do some soul-searching about it. But we did it—we changed our logo and changed our name in Quebec, because Quebecers’ tastes are slightly different than those of the rest of Canada, as are their values around work, play and family time. I think it showed that we really respected the culture of the people of Quebec.”

Providing French content to a Quebecois audience is about more than just following the rules to avoid issues with the “language police”. It’s a way of reaching out and engaging in a two-way dialogue with a community.

Working with a team of in-market professionals who understand the subtleties of Quebec’s language and culture will make it a lot easier for your business to reach and engage with this market.

Have questions? We’re here to help. Feel free to call us at 1 866 936 3833 or email contactus@latmultilingual.com.

Vancouver

200-1892 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 1YN

Montreal

407 McGill Road, Suite 700
Montreal, Quebec H2Y 2G3

1 866 936 3833 | contactus@latmultilingual.com

www.latmultilingual.com