

5 MARKETING
TIPS TO CONQUER
—QUÉBEC—

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About the Author

Guillaume Huppé is the founder of Mouton and has a deep, 360° understanding of both the Québec and English-Canadian markets. Thanks to his international experience acquired in England, France, Québec, and Ontario, Guillaume's knowledge of Latin and Anglo-Saxon business cultures is unprecedented; providing clients of Mouton with a unique blend of perspectives – the insider's and the outsider's.

Over the course of his career, Guillaume has worked as a consultant and as an employee, providing useful communication and marketing insights about the best practices for successful implementation of strategies in the Québec market. After meeting entrepreneurs in France, England, and Ontario, Guillaume realized how much the unique character of the Québec market made it difficult for SMEs to transpose their strategies to Québec; even if those same strategies were successful in English Canada. This reflects a true need for Mouton's services and is why the company was formed.

About Mouton

Mouton [mu.tɔ̃] provides English Canadian SMEs with exclusive marketing and communication services to help improve their understanding of the unique parameters of the Québec market through comprehensive consulting and training. We help SMEs adapt their content and strategies to improve their chances at penetrating the francophone market in Québec.

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An Introduction to the Québec Market

From a marketing standpoint, Québec is its own distinct market within the broader Canadian market. It is currently the 2nd wealthiest province in Canada and some experts speculate that it will rise to the wealthiest within the next 5 years.

For many entrepreneurs, Québec and its laws make it a rather complicated market. That said, Quebecers are among one of the most loyal customer groups in North America. Customers tend to prefer local companies or those that truly master the art of adapting their marketing – a fact overlooked by many English-Canadian marketers.

"French-speaking Québec is too big to ignore for national and international brands seeking relevance in Canada. Consumers in the province make up roughly one quarter of Canada's population, and three quarters of Quebecers only speak French at home, according to a new eMarketer report named Focus on French Canada: Using Digital Channels for Marketing in Québec."

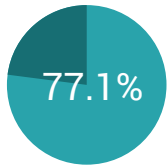
source: e-marketer.com

There are laws to enforce the usage of French in Québec, and these laws are very popular. Brands that don't play by the rules get sanctioned both by the government and by public opinion.

There is, by definition, historical reasons why Quebecers prefer the use of their own language on their territory. Furthermore, the aversion to English can easily be explained by a series of historical events. In short, Quebecers feel the urge to protect the last remaining French-speaking culture in North America and ultimately, they vote with their money!

For all the reasons above, Québec remains a difficult market to penetrate. That being said, if your business manages to win the heart of its consumers, Québec might very well become the top-grossing market for your business in a few short years. Don't you think it is worth giving it a shot?

10 Statistics About the Québec Market



1. 77.1% of Quebecers specify French as their first language.

Source: Statistiques Canada



2. 58% of Quebecers purchase goods online.

Source: Cefrio



3. 25% of Quebecers make 10 online purchases per year.

Source: National Bank of Canada



4. Only 14% of Québec companies sell goods or services online.

Source: Institut du Québec



5. Last year in Québec, there was a 6% increase in retail sales compared to the previous year.

Source: Desjardins



6. 49% of Quebecers seek information on Social Media before purchasing a product or a service, compared with 37% in the rest of Canada.

Source: Protégez-vous



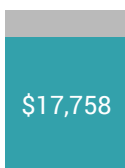
7. 54.7% of Quebecers follow a charity, a company, or a public personality on social media.

Source: TVA Nouvelles



8. By 2031, 4.5 million people will live in Montréal and Greater Montréal.

Source: Protégez-vous



9. Quebecers are among the least-indebted with a consumer debt of \$17,758, compared to \$21,164 in the rest of Canada.

Source: Protégez-vous



10. Once the cost of living is taken into account, a Québec couple has a purchasing power 5% higher than that of an Ontario couple.

Source: Le Devoir

Tip 1: Avoid Taboo Subjects



The cultural differences between Québec and the rest of Canada aren't limited to the use of a different language to communicate and by different shopping habits! As with every culture, there are sensitive topics that marketers should avoid at all cost. Here are the three topics you should try to limit or remove from your marketing efforts when trying to adapt them to appeal to a Québec audience.

National Identity

Due to the controversy and trauma caused by two polarizing referendums regarding the proposed separation of Québec from the rest of Canada, the national identity is probably one of the most-avoided topics among Quebecers. During that period, both the Québec and Canadian flags became strong symbols of the Yes and No campaigns in the province, respectively. To this day, though some Quebecers identify with the Canadian culture, others identify only with the Québec culture. Displaying either of these flags could be seen, to some extent, as a political statement. Because the topic of identity still divides the public opinion, it is best to avoid it! If you plan to touch on the national identity in your marketing communications, you might want to rethink this one and adapt a strategy better suited to the Québec market!

Money

Historically, money has been a taboo subject in Québec. People don't like to talk about money, and showing off wealth is seen as somewhat vulgar. Avoiding the topic of money can be difficult to do as a company. Sometimes, to tackle this issue, the solution is easy. For example, if your marketing communications incorporate the phrase "buy it now", you could ask your translator to use "get it now" in French. Other times, it will be more challenging to work around this touchy subject. For example, if your marketing communications dive into the topic of wealth or if they promote a wealthy lifestyle, you might want to completely reimagine your campaign.

The Use of English

Quebecers are so proud of their language that words in English used in a French context can often be triggering. They will even translate to French newly invented terms such as Selfie (égoportrait) and Podcast (ballado-diffusion) while France and other French-speaking countries tend to use these terms in English. Despite this, it is relatively common to see companies using a terminology list in English considered to be branded terms. Often these terms are to be translated under no circumstances, as per the HQ's instructions. Taking into consideration the unique context in Québec, if you want to seduce a Québec audience, it is always better to translate every word from your terminology list to French – even if they are branded terms! After all, even McDonald's adapted their iconic menu for Québec!

Tip 2: It's Not Just About Translating! It's About Adapting!



Your translator, either in-house or external, is your bridge between your communications and the Québec market. Unfortunately, when it comes to marketing messaging, you need a little more than just a translator. A translator can be suitable for legal documents, corporate messaging, and other non-marketing-related documents. For marketing communications, however, your translator should also become a content editor. You want your translator to review your English communications, keep the idea, adapt it to French, and ultimately, give the impression that it was written in French rather than translated from English. A good content editor for Québec will remove some of the original text and add new elements to the French text. By doing so, you will end up with a product that is coherent with your campaign messaging yet appealing to the Québec market.

Our Recommendations:

- We recommend getting your translator involved in the creative process to help him/her understand the core idea behind campaigns. In return, he/she will be able to better adapt your campaigns to the Québec market.
- We recommend hiring a native from Québec or someone with an advanced knowledge of the Québec market. Someone with a good knowledge of the local idioms, subjects to avoid, and specific sentence structure will be able to provide better translations suitable for the Québec market.
- Finally, trust your translator! It is sometimes impossible for a translator to explain to non-French speakers why one translation is better than the other, or why a concept won't work in French due to the fact that the reference points are so far off. That's why you hire a professional translator, right? Trust your hire, even if sometimes it means letting go of the original messaging! If he/she requests a change, they are probably right!

Tip 3: Be Aware of Québec's Regulations



For entrepreneurs, operating in Québec represents a challenge in terms of cultural differences. That said, the biggest challenge you might have to face is the unique nature of regulations in the province. The way you operate in the rest of Canada might not be the right way to do business in Québec. Though we are not legal experts at Mouton, we have some advice regarding three of the regulations our clients ask the most about:

1. French Language

La Chartre de la langue française is a law applicable to every business operating in Québec. It sets strict rules when it comes to the usage of French in the province. A business must use French:

- In its public display
- In its company name
- On the labels of any products offered in Québec
- On any document distributed in Québec
- On its website
- In its advertising

Non-compliance with this law could mean liability in the form of fines ranging from \$1,500 to \$20,000 per first offence. For any subsequent offence, that fine would double.

2. Contests

Hosting a contest is a fun way to get your audience engaged and excited! The process, however, can be a little more complicated in Québec than it is in other provinces! The lotteries, publicity contests and amusement machines Act regulates such initiatives in the province. To comply with the act, in most cases, you will have to:

- Notify the Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux
- Share information with the Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux
- Pay applicable fees
- Pay a security deposit
- Require a skill-testing question
- Outline the contest's rules
- Ensure adequate and fair disclosure
- Write a report (following the contest)

Failing to comply with this act can have serious consequences and lead to a fine of up to \$10,000,000.

3. Advertising to Kids

Unlike in other provinces, advertising directly to children under the age of 13 years of age is banned in Québec. Essentially, companies can't run ads targeted to children on the radio, television, online, mobile phones, printed material, signage, or promotional items if it is intended for children or appealing to them. The product or service doesn't have to be exclusively intended for kids for an ad to be considered appealing to them. If you are unsure about your advertisement, ask yourself these five questions:

- Who does my campaign target?
- Does my campaign appeal to children?
- Does the message or design of the campaign catch the attention of children?
- Are kids targeted by my campaign?
- Are they exposed to my campaign?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, your campaign is most likely banned in Québec.

If you are unsure about the way you operate in Québec, don't hesitate to seek legal advice. There are plenty of lawyers in Québec who can assist you with your legal questions. You might end up saving money and time in the end!

Tip 4: Redesign



Making content in two different languages with the aim to suit both Québec and the rest of Canada can be challenging! If that weren't enough, it also comes with a challenge for your graphic designer! If you decide to use the same graphic elements for both Québec and the rest of Canada, your graphic designer might find it challenging to make the French text fit into the same space. Why? Because generally speaking, French sentences end up being much longer than English sentences. Naturally, graphic designers usually design using English text which often results in the French sentence having to be compressed in order to fit in the same space. To avoid ending up with tiny text, we recommend that your graphic designer bases their designs on the French text. In most cases, if French fits in the designated space, English will too!

This might not be an issue should you choose to redesign the advertisement to be more appealing to the Québec market. There are some stylistic preferences that are truly unique to Québec, and you might want to take them into account. As a general rule, we always recommend avoiding the excess use of bold and capital words/sentences, as designs tend to be simpler in Québec. Ask yourself: "is this graphic element really necessary?" If it isn't, you might want to remove it!

Also, it might be advisable to remove any graphic elements that have anything to do with the national identity. In most cases, it is better to avoid using any flags - whether it is the Canadian flag or the Québec flag. The same goes for the maple leaf and the fleur de lys. If you are using images specific to Canada, such as a picture of a city or a specific landscape, you might want to consider replacing it with a city or a landscape from Québec if it is not already.



Tip 5: Rethink Your Messaging



In light of everything we have addressed in this guide, you might want to consider rethinking your messaging for the Québec market. In addition to avoiding taboo subjects, adapting your translations to market environments, and making sure you comply with local regulations, you also want to make sure to speak your audience's language! And we are not just talking about French!

The English language is wired differently; it tends to be more assertive than French. It's not rare to see the use of call to action sentences such as "Buy it Now" or "Call Us." This type of messaging may seem just fine in English, while it can be seen as too aggressive in French. Instead, we recommend using such suggestions as "Why not try our product today?" or other sentences that seem less aggressive, such as "One call will solve your problems!"

As a general rule, we recommend that you consider changing your messaging for Québec if:

- It is an order
- It is confrontational
- It is about religion or the national identity
- It is about money or promotes a wealthy lifestyle
- It includes English words that weren't translated to French