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Registering a Company Name in Quebec: Rules and Checks

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In this article

1. Name, assumed name and numbered company: three different things
2. Step 1: Search the register before you fall in love with a name
3. The Registraire's grounds for refusing a name
4. French-language rules: generic and specific
5. Adding an English or other-language version
6. Signage and advertising: what changed on June 1, 2025
7. Reserving a name and incorporating
8. If the Registraire refuses your name
9. Federal incorporation: NUANS and name preapproval
10. Trademark clearance is a separate step
11. A pre-filing checklist
12. Frequently asked questions
13. Sources

Name, assumed name and numbered company: three different things

Quebec's Registraire des entreprises distinguishes the legal name from any other name you trade under, and a corporation can replace the legal name with a number.

Type	What it is	Example
Constituting name (nom constitutif)	The legal name. Only one at a time. For a corporation, the name in the articles, used on contracts and invoices.	Les Entreprises Tremblay inc.
Numbered name (désignation numérique)	A number assigned by the Registraire instead of a chosen name	1234-5678 Québec inc.
Other name (autre nom, commonly "nom d'emprunt")	Any other name used to identify the enterprise in Quebec	Photographie Prixpro

These definitions come from the Registraire's guide [Les noms d'entreprises au Québec \(IN-531\)](#), sections 2.1 and 2.2. In practice:

- A sole proprietor's constituting name is their first and last name; any trade name must be declared as an other name ([Québec.ca](#)).
- A numbered company that trades under a brand declares the brand as an other name.
- Use is the test: an other name is declared as soon as you use it in Quebec and removed when you stop.
- The legal-form particle (inc., ltée, s.a.) belongs in a corporation's constituting name and cannot appear in an other name: "Photographie Prixpro" is fine, "Photographie Prixpro inc." is not ([IN-531](#), [section 4.1](#)).

Step 1: Search the register before you fall in love with a name

Éducaloi suggests a plain web and social media search first, then the Registraire des entreprises database, Canada's Business Registries (which covers most provinces, including Quebec) and NUANS, a paid federal search of corporate names and trademarks (Éducaloi). Read the results with two tests in mind.

"Identical" is broader than it sounds. For a business corporation or non-profit legal person under Quebec law, the constituting name cannot be identical to a name reserved by another enterprise or to a name in force in the register (IN-531, section 4.7). Annex V of IN-531 treats names as identical even when they differ only by punctuation, an article or possessive, a preposition or "&", a spelling with the same pronunciation, the same number in Roman numerals, word order, the legal-form indication, an abbreviation, or a non-distinctive word such as "compagnie" or "entreprise". The guide's example: "Laboratoire Maxos inc." and "Le Laboratoire Maxosse" are identical.

"Likely to be confused" is a separate problem. A name must not be likely to be confused with a name used by another, falsely suggest a link to another person or group, or mislead third parties; these situations can lead to administrative recourse before the Registraire (Québec.ca). An existing enterprise can ask the Registraire to order a confusing name changed (IN-531, section 8), so passing the "identical" filter does not end the risk.

A name that looks free today can still be refused. Every declared name is analysed when it is filed. Someone may reserve the name between your search and your filing, and a unique name can still fail the French-language or legal-form rules below.

The Registraire's grounds for refusing a name

Québec.ca lists the refusal criteria (Québec.ca); the examples below are from IN-531.

Refusal ground	Example
Not in French	"Grocery Chaloux" (the generic must be French)
Expression reserved to others by law, or prohibited	"Coopérative d'habitation..." for a company that is not a co-op; "Place des Arts"
Immoral, obscene or scandalous	"Enfreignez les lois! inc." refused; "Thé mon p'tit maudit!" accepted
Incorrect legal form	A sole proprietor's other name implying several members, such as "Librairie Gagnon et Tremblay"
Falsely implies a non-profit	"Fondation..." used by a business corporation
Falsely implies a public authority or link to one	"L'Institut de la scolarité du Québec"
Identical to a name used or reserved (Quebec legal persons)	"Laboratoire Maxos inc." vs "Le Laboratoire Maxosse"

Annex III of IN-531 lists reserved and prohibited expressions. Some that catch startups: Banque, Bank, Loan, Prêt, Fiducie, Trust, Université, Garderie, Coop, Caisse and Desjardins. Annex II lists the professional orders. If your name touches finance, insurance, education, health or a professional title, check those annexes first.

French-language rules: generic and specific

A Quebec enterprise name must respect the Charter of the French language and therefore be in French; for a Quebec legal person, a French name is a prerequisite to legal personality ([Québec.ca](https://www.quebec.ca)). A name has a **generic** (what kind of business: Quincaillerie, Transport), a **specific** (what distinguishes it: Saint-Jean, Will-Go) and sometimes a **particle** (inc., S.E.N.C.).

The rules in sections 4 and 5 of [IN-531](#), condensed:

1. **A French generic is mandatory when the specific is in another language.** "Voyages Will-Go" is accepted; "Will-Go" alone is not.
2. **The generic must be a French dictionary word, correctly accented, not abbreviated.** "Les Ent. Will-Go", "Renovation" without its accent and "C@fé\$" are refused.
3. **No second generic in another language**, even inside a coined word: "Les Entreprises Precioso Ristorante" is refused.
4. **French word order.** When the generic means the same in both languages, it goes first: "Transport Faster", not "Faster Transport".
5. **French pronunciation.** "Mechanix", "Super Xperts" and "2 Design 4 U" are refused because they only make sense in English.
6. **A specific can stand alone** if it is a surname (John Smith), an artificial mix of letters and numbers (A1B2C3), or a French word, acronym or coined word (Effibus). A surname with "'s" needs a French generic: "Matthew's Aménagement".
7. **Official Quebec place names are not translated:** "Trois-Rivières Grocery" is acceptable as an English version, "Three-Rivers Grocery" is not.

If your name uses a coined word or acronym, IN-531 says to state it in the field provided in the application.

Adding an English or other-language version

A French name can be accompanied by a version in another language, one version per language ([IN-531, section 6.1](#)). For a Quebec business corporation, the English version must contain "Corporation" or "Company" or end with Corp, Ltd or Inc (section 4.1).

- **Trademarks.** A trademark in another language can be declared as an other name without a French generic only if it is a Canadian trademark registered with the Canadian Intellectual Property Office (CIPO), has no French version, and carries TM, MC, ® or MD (section 6.2).
- **Domain names.** A domain that identifies the enterprise must be declared and follow the same rules: French, with an optional other-language version. "bijouteriesherbrooke.com" plus "sherbrookejewelry.com" works; the English one alone does not (section 7.1). Product domains need not be declared, and an email address cannot be a declared name.
- **Companies incorporated elsewhere.** A federal or out-of-province corporation registering in Quebec without a French version of its name must declare a French other name: "Bolt Transport Inc." can operate as "Transport Bolt" (section 6.3).

Signage and advertising: what changed on June 1, 2025

IN-531 notes that signage rules are enforced by the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF), not the Registraire. The OQLF's new rules on public signage and commercial advertising have been in force since June 1, 2025 (OQLF):

- A business name's specific may be only in another language if it comes with a French generic ("Vêtements Coolkids").
- A name with a non-French specific, or a trademark wholly or partly in another language, that is **visible from outside** must be accompanied by French terms (generic, descriptor or slogan) so French is clearly predominant.
- Clearly predominant means, among other things, French text taking at least twice the space, being at least as visible and legible, and sitting in the same visual field as the name. Phone numbers, addresses and hours do not count.
- If a French version of a trademark is registered, it must be displayed inside and outside.

For the wider Bill 96 picture, see our guide to [Bill 96 compliance for Quebec businesses](#).

Reserving a name and incorporating

Reservation is optional and valid for 90 days. It stops the Registraire from accepting an identical name for another company and pre-validates yours, lowering the risk of refusal at incorporation. It does **not** stop another business declaring the same words as an other name. To extend, you file a new request; fees for refused requests are not refunded ([Québec.ca, réservation de nom](#)).

For a Quebec business corporation, a name reservation costs \$27 (regular) or \$40.50 (priority), as of October 2026 ([Québec.ca, tarifs du Registraire](#)). Full costs are in [what it costs to incorporate in Quebec in 2026](#).

At incorporation you propose a name or ask for a numbered designation (a number and the word Québec, followed by "inc."), and you can file the articles together with the notice of head office address and list of directors ([Québec.ca, constituer une société par actions](#)). The numbered route is the usual fallback when a name is stuck: incorporate now, then declare your trade name as an other name once it clears.

Worked example (illustrative). Maya plans a design studio called "Northline". No identical name turns up. But "Northline" alone is an English specific with no French generic, so it fails rule 1. Fix: "Studio de design Northline inc." as the constituting name, "Northline Design Studio Inc." as the English version, and "studionorthline.com" declared as the domain. Her window sign adds a French descriptor so French dominates.

If the Registraire refuses your name

The Registraire sends its decision with reasons. If you disagree, IN-531 gives two routes ([section 8.1](#)):

1. **Administrative review by the Registraire.** Send the refused name, the request reference number (it starts with 0202), your NEQ if any, and new explanations. Reviews are generally handled within five business days of receipt. An unfavourable review can still be contested before the Tribunal.

2. **Contest directly before the Tribunal administratif du Québec (TAQ)** within 30 days of notification of the decision.

Both apply to constituting names and other names. Many refusals are fixed faster by adjusting the name (a French generic, an accent, word order) than by arguing.

Federal incorporation: NUANS and name preapproval

Under the Canada Business Corporations Act (CBCA), the NUANS search is built into most online applications, including name preapproval, and you should not order a report before filing those. A report obtained before filing is required for CBCA revivals and amalgamations, among other cases. A federal NUANS search costs \$13.80 as of October 2026 ([Corporations Canada](#)).

Federal approval does not settle the Quebec question: a federal corporation operating in Quebec registers with the Registraire and needs a French name or French other name. Pick a federal name that already works in French. Steps and costs are in our [federal incorporation guide](#).

Trademark clearance is a separate step

A registered business name is not a trademark. Once the Registraire accepts a name it refuses other applications with the same name, which gives some protection; registering a trademark with CIPO gives the exclusive right to use it for your goods or services throughout Canada. A trademark must be distinctive: place names, a few letters or phrases like "Best in Canada" are weak ([Éducaloi](#)).

Search the [Canadian Trademarks Database](#), which covers more than 1.4 million Canadian trademarks, including inactive marks cancelled, expunged, abandoned or refused after 1979. A conflicting mark in your field is a reason to rename before you print anything. Éducaloi suggests a trademark agent for the filing.

A pre-filing checklist

- ☐ Legal form chosen (it decides the particle).
- ☐ Web, social media and domain search done.
- ☐ Register searched for identical names, using the Annex V tests.
- ☐ Reserved expressions and professional titles checked (IN-531, Annexes II and III).
- ☐ French generic in front of any non-French specific; accents and pronunciation checked.
- ☐ Official Quebec place names untranslated.
- ☐ English version (one at most) with Inc., Ltd or Corp.
- ☐ French domain secured.
- ☐ Federal route: NUANS in the online filing, French other name planned.
- ☐ Canadian Trademarks Database searched.
- ☐ Reservation (90 days) or numbered company as fallback.
- ☐ Head office address ready.
- ☐ Signs and ads with clearly predominant French.

Frequently asked questions

Can I use my own name?

Yes. A sole proprietor's constituting name is already their first and last name, and a surname alone (for example "John Smith") is an acceptable name without a generic. Add "'s" and you need a French generic (IN-531, sections 5.2 and 5.3).

Can I keep an English name?

As a version alongside a French name, yes. On its own, only in limited cases such as a registered Canadian trademark with no French version. On outdoor signs, French must be clearly predominant (OQLF).

Do I need a French website name?

If the domain identifies your enterprise, yes: it is declared and must be in French, with an optional other-language version. Product domains are exempt.

Does reserving a name protect my brand?

Only for 90 days and only against identical names for other companies. It is not a trademark.

This article is general information, not legal advice.

If you need an address for the filing, 2727 Coworking's [virtual mailbox plans](#) provide a civic address at 2727 Rue Saint-Patrick in Griffintown that can be used on REQ and incorporation filings.

Sources

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8. Choosing a Name and Logo for Your Business (Éducaloi)
9. Introduction to the Canadian Trademarks Database (CIPO)

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

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