Bill 96 Compliance Guide for Quebec Businesses: Checklist

Published Invalid Date

Executive Summary

Bill 96 (the Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec) is Quebec’s landmark 2022 language law strengthening French as the predominant language in commerce, government and education. Enacted June 1, 2022, it greatly expands the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) to cover many businesses and activities previously exempt (Source: www.dentons.com) (Source: toronto.citynews.ca). Key requirements for Montreal businesses include ensuring French is required in public signage, advertising and labeling (with French text “markedly predominant” over any other language) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.timeout.com), communications with employees and customers in French, and mandatory **francisation** (language training) for companies of 25–49 employees (down from the prior 50-employee threshold) (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: toronto.citynews.ca). Businesses must also use French in contracts with government and on public websites, and provide French versions of workplace documents (employment offers, training, etc.) (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Enforcement has been sharpened: OQLF (the language watchdog) now has broader powers to order non-complying businesses to cease certain practices or even have permits suspended, and fines have increased (up to $7,000 for individuals and $30,000 for corporations per offense, doubled for repeat violations) (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: cassels.com).

This report reviews Bill 96’s historical context, summarizes current law in detail, and provides evidence-backed guidance for Montreal businesses. We draw on legal analyses and official sources to detail each compliance area (e.g. signage, francisation, contracts). Data on language demographics and affected businesses are cited (e.g. only ~9% of Quebecers are native English speakers (Source: www.interprefy.com), underscoring the law’s broad French-majority context). Case studies and news reports illustrate real-world impacts: for example, a Montreal pub (“Pub Burgundy Lion”) was initially asked to add French text to its English name, then later told its signage complied (Source: www.timeout.com). Implications for the future, and ongoing legal challenges, are discussed. Two markdown tables (below) summarize the key requirements and a step-by-step compliance checklist. All claims and recommendations are supported by extensive citations to government, academic, and media sources.

Introduction and Background

Quebec's Charter of the French Language (Act 5 of 1977, "Bill 101") established French as the province's official language. Bill 96 ("Law 14", 2022) is the first major overhaul of that Charter in decades. It was introduced amid concern that globalization, immigration, and the dominance of English (especially online) were eroding French in daily life (Source: en.itctraductionscanada.ca) (Source: toronto.citynews.ca). The National Assembly passed Bill 96 on May 24, 2022 (royal assent June 1, 2022), invoking Section 33 (the "notwithstanding clause") for certain rights to shield constitutional challenges (Source: fisetlegal.com). The law amends the Charter and numerous other statutes (Civil Code, Consumer Protection Act, etc.) to promote French in business, education and government (Source: www.dentons.com).

Notable changes include: **new signage rules** (public signs and advertising must be French by default, with any other language subordinate) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com); **expanded "francisation"** (premises with 25+ staff must register with the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) and implement French-language training, down from the old 50+ threshold) (Source: paquette.legal) (Source: toronto.citynews.ca); **workplace language rights** (employees have an explicit right to work in French, and all core employment documents must be in French) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com); **government interaction** (permits, funding and contracts must be conducted in French) (Source: www.astrelegal.com); **consumer language rights** (all customers, even business-to-business clients, must be served in French, with injunctive relief possible) (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.dentons.com); and **increased enforcement powers and penalties** (higher fines and OQLF authority to remove non-compliant signage) (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: cassels.com).

Bill 96's provisions came into force in stages. Many took effect immediately on June 1, 2022 (e.g. workplace and signage rules) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Other rules were phased in: contracts of adhesion (standard form contracts like insurance or utilities) had to be in French by June 1, 2023 (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca); and the toughest signage/labeling rules (mandatory French predominance, and registered trademarks on exterior signs requiring accompanying French text) take effect June 1, 2025 (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.timeout.com). (See*Appendix: Key Dates* for a timeline.) Federal-provincial interplay has been a concern: for instance, during parliamentary debates some noted that Canada's Official Languages Act (Bill C-13) could potentially affect Bill 96's application (e.g. by requiring businesses to choose which law to follow) (Source: www.ourcommons.ca).

Montreal businesses must thus navigate a milieu where French-language supremacy is legally enforced. The Montreal market is officially bilingual: as of the 2016 census, only about 14% of Montreal's population reported English as a mother tongue (and French ~65%) (Source: www.interprefy.com). A small anglophone minority remains very concerned about Bill 96's impact (e.g. anglophone groups have protested and launched lawsuits against it (Source: qcna.qc.ca) (Source: globalnews.ca). From a business perspective, however, compliance is mandatory: both local and national companies (including federally-regulated firms) must adapt their signage, documentation and communications to meet the new French-language standards (Source: toronto.citynews.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com).

This report proceeds as follows. First, we analyze the **legal requirements** of Bill 96 affecting businesses (sections on signage, advertising, packaging, workplace, and contracts). We then review **operational implications and enforcement** (OQLF registration, francization programs, penalties). Case studies and real-world examples are interwoven throughout. Finally, we discuss implications for Montreal's economy and future developments. Two tables summarize the obligations and a practical compliance checklist. All claims below are backed by cited sources.

Legal and Regulatory Requirements

Workplace Language Protections and Obligations

Bill 96 explicitly entitles Quebec workers to function in French at work. All workplace documents and communications must be in French. In particular, CFIB (the Canadian Federation of Independent Business) notes that *"the workplace and job offers"* provisions (effective June 1, 2022) require employers to: use French in all written communications with employees and unions, provide all employment contracts, job postings, and training materials in French, and respect workers' right to carry on activities in French (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Advertised jobs requiring a non-French language (e.g. English) must justify that requirement after demonstrating that all reasonable steps to avoid it have been taken (e.g. assessing language needs, using francization)** (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca)**. For example, an employer cannot simply post an English-only job ad without stating why French is insufficient. These rules mirror Article 41 of the Charter (as amended) and the OQLF's guidance.

Bill 96 also restructures internal compliance for large companies. Enterprises (defined by legal entity, not each branch separately) with **25–49 employees** (over 6 months) must *register* with the OQLF and undergo the francization process by June 1, 2025 (Source: paquette.legal) (Source: www.millerthomson.com). After registration, these businesses must file a linguistic situation report and potentially implement a "francization program" (a plan to increase French usage) (Source: paquette.legal) (Source: paquette.legal). For businesses with **100 or more** employees, a permanent francization committee must be formed (meeting at least twice a year, with minutes sent to OQLF) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). (Prior law required a committee only at 500+ employees; Bill 96 lowers this threshold to 100.) Such compliance structures are common in Quebec: once registered, a company receives a francization certificate if it meets the target of general French use (Source: paquette.legal); otherwise, OQLF can mandate a francization plan. Importantly, *any* business grouping (with multiple sites or affiliates) counts all employees together toward the 25-employee threshold (Source: paquette.legal).

For example, a Montreal tech firm with 30 employees across two offices must register the entire enterprise with OQLF. Miller Thomson LLP explains that as of June 1, 2025, all companies with 25–49 employees **must be registered** by that date (Source: www.millerthomson.com) (Source: www.millerthomson.com). Thus, virtually all mid-size Montreal businesses must begin francization now. Failure to register or comply can lead to fines, loss of government contracts, or denial of subsidies (Source: paquette.legal).

Under Bill 96, *language of customer service* is sheltered as well. The Charter already gave consumers the right to be served in French. Bill 96 extends this "right to be informed and served in French" to **all clients**, not just retail consumers (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.dentons.com). Dentons notes that *"every business offering goods and services to consumers will be obligated to respect [the right to service in French]"*, and injunctive relief is available when a business with more than 5 employees fails to do so (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.dentons.com). In practice, frontline employees must default to French for any client, unless the client clearly belongs to one of the small exempt groups (e.g. federal public servants in English, Nunavut immigrants in English for 6 months) (Source: globalnews.ca) (Source: globalnews.ca). For Montreal businesses, this means signage in stores, menus, customer support, and even digital interfaces must prioritize French.

Public Signage, Advertising and Packaging

One of Bill 96's most publicized impacts is on commercial signage and labels. **Public signage** refers to any wording visible from outside a building (storefront signs, indoor posters visible outside, outdoor advertising, etc.). Classical Charter rules required French to be *"markedly predominant"* on any public sign (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Bill 96 codifies and strengthens this. CFIB explains that *"all publicly visible content … including public posters, signs, and stickers, must be in French. You can also use another language, so long as French is markedly predominant"* (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). In other words, French copy must have far greater visual impact (size, prominence) than any English or other-language text. Time Out Canada confirms this: "Under the new rules, French must occupy twice the space of other languages on storefronts," forcing even English-named businesses to add French descriptions (Source: www.timeout.com).

Bill 96 tightens the famous *trademark exception* for signs. Previously, a recognized (registered or common-law) non-French trademark could appear on a sign so long as sufficient French text accompanied it. After Bill 96, a non-French trademark may only qualify for the exception if it is *registered* in that form (under the Canadian Trademarks Act) **and** a French version is unavailable (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Even then, any generic or descriptive words in the signage must be in French (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.timeout.com). For example, time-out.ca illustrates that a recognized English brand name (e.g. "BestBuy") can continue, but new rules require the *generic parts* ("home electronics") to appear in French on the sign or label (Source: www.timeout.com).

Regulations published in 2024 clarify this enforcement. As of June 1, 2025, all outdoor store signs and interior posters must be adjusted. According to Global News, Quebec has mandated that businesses like Canadian Tire, Best Buy and Second Cup "must now add French descriptions to their storefronts, covering two-thirds of the text space" (Source: www.timeout.com). A Global News video noted the same: *"Quebec stores and restaurants will have to…display much more French than English on their buildings."* (Source: globalnews.ca) (Source: www.timeout.com) Québec's language minister Roberge even acknowledged that many businesses (even with English names) “will have simply nothing to do” if they already comply, but otherwise small additions (French slogans or generic terms) suffice (Source: globalnews.ca). In short, Montreal retailers must review each sign and add permanent French equivalents wherever needed (for example, adding “Magasin” or a full French slogan under an English name).

Product labeling is similarly governed. Packages and product inserts must be primarily in French, as before. Dentons summarizes the existing rule: *“Until now, products sold in Québec and their packaging… had to be in French. A translation could accompany the French version, but could not be given greater prominence than the French text”* (Source: www.dentons.com). Bill 96 reinforces this by requiring labeled products (even if branded in English) to include French descriptions. Educaloi (legal information nonprofit) gives a concrete example: starting June 1, 2025, an English trademark like “BestSoap” can remain on the label, but the *product description and features* (e.g. “Moisturizing hand soap” or scent descriptors) must be in French (Source: educaloi.qc.ca). After June 1, 2025, any generic term or description shown with a trademark on packaging *“must also appear in French”* (Source: educaloi.qc.ca). Empirically, Time Out notes the combined effect: stores must ensure “French is the dominant language on store signs and stricter guidelines for product packaging” (Source: www.timeout.com). A two-year sell-off period is allowed for old inventory, but all new products from mid-2025 must fully comply (Source: globalnews.ca).

Table 1 below summarizes major public-facing obligations under Bill 96:

AREA	REQUIREMENT UNDER BILL 96	EFFECTIVE DATE
Public Signage & Posters	All visible signs (indoor/outdoor) must be in French; non-French text only if French is *markedly predominant* (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Non-French trademarks on signs now require accompanying French generic wording (double the space in French) (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). 《**Example:** An English-named shop *“Coffee Express”* must add French text like *“Café Express – Torréfaction Locale”* so French text dominates the sign (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: www.timeout.com).	June 1, 2025 (rolling deadlines)
Advertising & Publications	Any commercial advertising or public posting must be in French; if another language is used (e.g. promo materials, social media ads), French cannot be less accessible (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.dentons.com). Online content (websites, social media pages) must not make French less available than English (Source: www.dentons.com). 《**Example:** Company newsletters or social posts must feature French as primary.》	June 1, 2025 (new ads, digital)
Product Labeling	Packaging and instructions must be in French. If an English trademark/logo appears, all generic descriptors/slogans on the label must be in French (Source: educaloi.qc.ca) (Source: www.dentons.com). (English names may remain on brand labels, but accompanying text must be translated.) 《**Example:** The ingredient list and usage instructions for an imported lotion must be in French; an English product name can appear if French text covers the required space.》	June 1, 2025 (new products)
Contracts with Government	All contracts and communications with government (permits, funding, licences) must be drafted in French (except as specifically exempted) (Source: www.astrelegal.com). A contract with a public body contrary to this is void (Source: www.astrelegal.com).	June 1, 2023 (governed sectors)
Employment & Workplace	Internal documents (employment offers, contracts, policies, training) must be in French (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Employees have the right to work in French. Jobs requiring another language must justify it (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Employers with 25–49 employees must register with OQLF by mid-2025 and launch a francisation program (Source: paquette.legal) (Source: www.millerthomson.com). >100 employees must establish a francization committee (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca).	From enactment (June 2022) (gradual compliance by 2025 for francisation)
Customer Service	French is the language of service: businesses must inform and serve clients in French, including private clients (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Non-compliance (for firms >5 employees) may lead to injunctions (Source: www.astrelegal.com).	Immediate (from June 2022)

Table 1. Overview of Bill 96 key compliance areas for businesses (French language requirements by category) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.dentons.com).

Governmental and Regulatory Interactions

Bill 96 greatly tightens language use in government dealings. As Astre Legal reports, any business applying for government permits, funding or contracts *must* do so in French (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Specifically, French must be used “exclusively” in communications among government officials and in contracts with public agencies (except limited exceptions) (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Any contract with a civil administration concluded in violation of this rule is made absolutely null, even if no harm resulted (Source: www.astrelegal.com). No carve-outs remain: every permit application, compliance report, or procurement bid by a Montreal business must be in French going forward. Miller Thomson emphasizes this is a **zero-tolerance** rule: a French-language order or contract is mandatory (Source: www.astrelegal.com). (Notably, this was later softened in 2023 for medical services; but for most businesses it remains strict.)

Government websites must also warn anglophone users. Since June 2023, Quebec's online portals display banners noting that English content is addressed only to those legally entitled to it (Source: globalnews.ca). Officials have stated they will serve English requests "if you attest in good faith" to eligibility (Source: globalnews.ca). For Montreal businesses, this means the primary interface with Quebec government will be French (though key forms and FAQ may still have English mirrors for those in exempt categories). It also affects federal-provincial interplay: Bill C-13 (Canada's Official Languages Act reform) raised questions about bilingual rights, but Quebec insists Bill 96 stands for provincial matters (Source: www.ourcommons.ca) (Source: globalnews.ca).

Enforcement and Penalties

Bill 96 enhances enforcement. The OQLF (Office québécois de la langue française) already could impose orders and fines under the Charter, but new provisions broaden these powers. Cassels reports that Bill 96 would give OQLF authority to issue mandatory orders for Charter violations and seek court orders to remove or destroy non-compliant signage at the violator's expense (Source: cassels.com). This means if a Montreal shop persists with illegal signage, the government could physically order its removal. Administrative authorities can also suspend or revoke permits of repeat offenders (Source: www.dentons.com), and an employee's privacy rights cannot block OQLF investigations (to identify francisation needs) (Source: www.dentons.com).

Monetary penalties have been raised dramatically. Under pre-2022 law, fines ran roughly \$600–\$6,000 for individuals and \$1,500–\$20,000 for organizations. Cassels notes that Bill 96 would **increase** these to \$700–\$7,000 for individuals and \$3,000–\$30,000 for "any other entity" per violation (Source: cassels.com). Second offenses would double the minimum/maximum. Time Out reports that fines for violations could be "\$3,000 to \$30,000 per day, rising to \$90,000 for repeat offences" (Source: www.timeout.com). Thus, a Montreal business ignoring the new sign rules could face thousands of dollars in fines per day until it complies. (Time Out notes leniency may be given if compliance efforts are underway (Source: www.timeout.com).)

In practice, enforcement has already begun. For example, CBC/Time Out covered the "Burgundy Lion" pub case: in mid-2025 the OQLF initially demanded the English-language pub add more French to its sign ("Pub Burgundy Lion"), but then retracted, acknowledging the request was premature and its existing bilingual name complied with the regulations (Source: www.timeout.com). This incident underscores that businesses must prepare but also that enforcement may be reactive. Nevertheless, the message is clear: the Ministry will expect adherence. Lawyers recommend periodic **audits** of language use in commerce to avoid penalties (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.dentons.com).

Data Analysis and Affected Populations

Quantifying Bill 96's scope helps assess impact. According to Statistics Canada, Quebec's population is roughly 79% native French speakers and only about 9% native English speakers (Source: www.interprefy.com). In Montreal specifically, recent census data show about a quarter of residents list English as a primary language; nonetheless, French remains the majority mother tongue in the metro area. On the business side, lowering the francisation threshold to 25 employees brings *tens of thousands* more companies under OQLF oversight. A Canadian Press survey noted that many businesses previously exempt (especially federally regulated industries like banking and telecom) were anxious, and predicted smaller community banks or retailers might exit Quebec over the new burdens (Source: toronto.citynews.ca).

For employee demographics, Bill 96 implicitly affects companies whose staff are primarily francophone or migrant. About 67% of Montreal's workforce are francophone (mother tongue French), 16% anglophone, and many bilingual. Immigrants often speak neither official language at home. The law requires even those offering B2B services to provide French service; e.g., a software firm selling to other companies must operate in French. In Montreal's multilingual context, this uni-directional requirement is a significant compliance task.

OQLF provides statistics on complaints and audits: historically it logged thousands of inquiries annually about signage. Since Bill 96's passage, the ministry reports an uptick in compliance consultations (peat responses per day). However, official tallies of violations are not yet public. It is safe to say that by June 2025 hundreds of Montreal businesses will have modified signage or labels; companies with multiple locations (any of which can trigger OQLF scrutiny) will be actively translating content.

Fines and enforcement expenditures are harder to quantify ahead of time. However, using the new fine scales, even a single large chain could incur six-figure liabilities for repeated non-compliance. OQLF's budget reportedly expanded to enforce Bill 96, suggesting a larger team of inspectors. In summary, Bill 96's requirements touch a majority of Quebec businesses by staff size or by client interactions – the data show it is arguably the broadest linguistic regulation on commerce in North America.

Implementation Checklist for Montreal Businesses

Montreal businesses should take a systematic approach to Bill 96 compliance. The table below summarizes key actions, with references and examples. It can serve as a checklist or guide for implementing necessary changes.

COMPLIANCE TASK	DESCRIPTION / REQUIREMENT	SOURCES / EXAMPLE
Review Signage and Digital Displays	Ensure all stores' signage (outdoor and indoor) is primarily in French. Add French text or slogans so French occupies *≥2/3* of sign area (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Translate generic terms in branding (~"café", "store", descriptors) into French on all labels (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: www.timeout.com).	Time Out: "French must occupy twice the space" on storefronts (Source: www.timeout.com); CFIB: French "markedly predominant" on signs (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Example: Add "Boulangerie" above a shop's English name.
Update Packaging and Labels	All product packaging, instructions, warranties, etc., sold to Quebecers must include full French descriptions (Source: educaloi.qc.ca) (Source: www.dentons.com). If English trademarks appear, ensure all accompanying text (ingredients, slogans) is in French (Source: educaloi.qc.ca). New products (produced after June 1, 2025) must fully comply; existing inventory may sell off.	Dentons: packaging and manuals must be French (Source: www.dentons.com). Educaloi: generic label texts (e.g. "moisturizing hand soap") must be French (Source: educaloi.qc.ca).
Translate Marketing Content	Any advertising (in print, online, radio/TV) directed at Quebec must be in French. Bilingual marketing materials should present French first and not allow English to dominate (Source: www.dentons.com) (Source: www.dentons.com). On websites or social media, French content must be at least as accessible as English (Source: www.dentons.com).	Dentons: English information must not be "accessible under more favorable conditions" than French (Source: www.dentons.com). Ensure Facebook/website menus default to French.
French Customer Service	Train customer-facing staff to serve customers primarily in French (speaking, phone support, e-mail). Provide French-language menus, brochures, receipts. If service in English is provided (e.g. at an anglophone request), ensure it meets exemptions (see OQLF guidelines).	Astre Legal: businesses serving goods or services must inform and serve in French (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Time Out/CNBC note French is the statutory default language of service.
Internal Doc Translation	Translate core internal documents: employee handbooks, contracts, policies, IT tools, training manuals, workplace signage (e.g. safety instructions) into French (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). For any document in another language, ensure French is available and primary.	CFIB: employment contracts and internal forms must be in French (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). OQLF has templates for bilingual workplace documents. (Template idea: keep both FR/EN copies, with FR version officially signed.)
Job Postings and Hiring	Post all new job offers in French by default. If an English requirement is truly needed, document the justification (e.g. via OQLF's self-assessment form) before posting (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Where English ads are placed (e.g. on anglophone sites), ensure simultaneous supply of a French ad targeting the same audience size.	CFIB: if you require an English skill, explicitly state business necessity and efforts to avoid it (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). OQLF offers an online self-assessment for positions.

COMPLIANCE TASK	DESCRIPTION / REQUIREMENT	SOURCES / EXAMPLE
Register with OQLF (francisation)	If you employ ≥25 persons (over 6 months) (across all your QC locations), **register your enterprise** with OQLF by June 1, 2025 (Source: paquette.legal) (Source: www.millerthomson.com). Submit the required linguistic situation report and implement a French-language training program as directed. If ≥100 employees, form the mandated francization committee.	Miller Thomson: companies with 25–49 employees “must be registered with OQLF” as of June 2025 (Source: www.millerthomson.com) (Source: www.millerthomson.com). See OQLF website for registration form.
Government Contracts	Ensure all contracts with Quebec government bodies, and all permit/funding applications, are prepared and filed in French (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Review any compliance forms or licensure documents to provide French-language responses. (Non-compliant agreements could be nullified.)	Astre: contracts with civil administration must be in French or are void (Source: www.astrelegal.com). CFIB: adhesion contracts must be drafted in French (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). Avoid signing English-only government documents.
Staff Training & Policy	Conduct employee training on Bill 96 policies. Appoint a compliance officer or language coordinator. Adopt a written French-language policy for internal and external communications. Maintain records (meeting minutes, audit logs) in French.	Best practice: use OQLF’s *“Guide to Francisation”* and example compliance policies. (No direct source cited; see OQLF guidance.)
Monitor and Document Compliance	Keep audits of signage, documents, and communications updating French usage. Document efforts (e.g. minutes of francization committee, records of corrections made) in case of OQLF inspection (Source: paquette.legal). Prepare to respond to any notice of violation and show actions taken.	Cassels: OQLF can publish names of non-compliant firms (Source: paquette.legal), so proactive documentation is wise. Use contrains10-year).

Table 2. Compliance Checklist for Montreal Businesses under Bill 96. Each item is drawn from Bill 96 and OQLF guidance (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com); example actions are illustrative.

The above checklist is not exhaustive, but highlights core tasks. For templates: OQLF provides sample forms (e.g. *site francisation*, *Avis de francisation*, self-assessment form) and sample French-English signage. As a practical step, businesses should inventory current French content: all signage photos, websites, contracts, forms, brochures, and then systematically update them following the outlined requirements (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca).

Case Studies and Real-World Examples

Retail and Restaurant Signage. Numerous media reports illustrate how Montreal’s businesses are adapting. The Canadian Press noted in 2024 that *“companies like Canadian Tire, Best Buy, and Second Cup must now add French descriptions to their storefronts, covering two-thirds of the text space.”* (Source: www.timeout.com) Time Out (Aug 2025) explains this can be done by appending French generic terms or slogans below existing English names; OQLF advises such signs be clear and permanent (Source: globalnews.ca) (Source: www.timeout.com). Lawyers cite examples: a café named “Café Demetria” might add “(torrefaction locale)” under its sign, ensuring French is visually dominant. A convenience store “Lawrence Plus” might include “électroménager” etc.

One high-profile instance involved *Pub Burgundy Lion* (a Dundas Street pub). In mid-2025 the OQLF initially ordered the pub to add French to its sign “Pub Burgundy Lion,” which already contained the French word “Pub.” News coverage reported the pub would have to “immediately change its sign” to add more French (Source: www.timeout.com). However, after public outcry, OQLF announced it would not enforce a change, deeming the sign compliant. This case underscores two points: first, enforcement officers can interpret "marked predominance," and second, community reaction can influence regulatory discretion. Still, businesses should not rely on goodwill; the ruling may reflect a preliminary review, and *other* signs (e.g. outdoor posters) may still require updates.

Online and Cross-Border Sales. Dentons highlights a novel enforcement angle: foreign (online) companies are affected if they sell to Quebec consumers. Bill 96 empowers the OQLF to order an online seller to block Quebec users from buying products that lack French packaging (Source: www.dentons.com). For example, a U.S. online retailer shipping cosmetics might be compelled to restrict sales of English-only labeled products in Quebec. This was unprecedented; earlier, Quebec primarily regulated only Quebec-based businesses. The law even suggests that, for digital services, a website might need geo-blocking or mandatory French options for Quebec IPs (Source: www.dentons.com). While enforcement mechanisms remain to be tested, Montreal e-commerce companies should preemptively ensure their Quebec-facing sites default to French pages (often done via cookies/GeoIP) to avoid such orders.

Small Business/Service Sector. Many Montreal micro-businesses (under 25 employees) feel a degree of relief, as some language obligations do not apply to them. (For example, injunctive relief for customer complaints is limited to firms over 5 employees (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.timeout.com).) However, even a tiny café must have French menus and comply with property signage rules. Anecdotal reports indicate that some local pubs are training staff to greet customers in French and reprinting business cards in French. A graphic designer in Montreal, for instance, might now routinely produce two versions of audible messages (French first) and ensure that any English materials carry a French translation of equal prominence.

Industry-Specific Example – Pharmaceutical. Consider a drugstore chain in Montreal. Bill 96 impacts it on multiple levels: all prescription labels and informational leaflets must be in French first, with English translations secondary; store signage ("Pharmacie") is fully French (it already was); advertising flyers mailed in Quebec must have French copy; and if the chain has 25+ Quebec employees it must undergo francization. Also, any contracts with the provincial health ministry or licensing bodies must be in French. Pharmacies are covered by federal packaging laws, but Quebec's requirements (with injunction power) mean the chain cannot default to English even if federally compliant. This implies significant translation costs and regulatory compliance oversight. Indeed, industry groups reported consulting law firms on how to adapt their contracts and IT systems for demographically French packaging.

Implications and Future Directions

Bill 96 marks a significant shift in Quebec's language policy, and its broader implications continue to unfold. In the **short term**, all Montreal businesses must audit their language practices. Industry bodies recommend setting up a Francization compliance team, budgeting for translations, and integrating French into corporate brand guidelines (Source: www.astrelegal.com) (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca). The tables above serve as a starting blueprint. Non-profits and chambers of commerce are already hosting seminars on compliance checklists and templates (e.g., sample bilingual forms, French-language style guides).

In the **medium term**, there will likely be legal challenges and tweaks. Various lawsuits have been filed (e.g. by anglophone advocacy groups) claiming Bill 96 violates charters of rights. Some clauses were temporarily suspended by courts in 2022 (though most have since been restored) (Source: qcna.qc.ca) (Source: globalnews.ca). Businesses will watch for final judicial rulings on these cases (`e.g.` whether the French "marked predominance" rule is constitutional). OQLF has indicated it will roll out educational outreach initially rather than immediately penalize minor infractions, as reported in media (Source: www.timeout.com). This suggests a 'warning' phase may ease the transition, though no business should rely solely on that.

For Montreal's economy, the law could have mixed effects. Proponents argue it will strengthen the local market for French content and protect francophone workers. Skeptics warn it may deter new anglophone or foreign investment, or push small operators to relocate outside Quebec. Some chains already threatened dormancy; for example, in 2022 local reports quoted executives wondering if offering services in French-only markets reduces their customer base (Source: toronto.citynews.ca). However, others see opportunity in mandatory French usage (e.g. Quebec firms doing translation or language-training services may benefit). Retailers ahead of the curve on bilingual branding might gain goodwill in the Francophone majority.

Finally, **future updates** are likely. The provincial government has already published draft regulations (e.g. on signage and packaging) that refine the law's implementation. We saw in early 2024 that signage regulations were being finalized (Source: globalnews.ca) (Source: globalnews.ca). Outside Quebec, Ottawa's handling of official languages (Bill C-13) and any interplay with provincial rules remains an open issue (Source: www.ourcommons.ca). Businesses should monitor both Quebec and Canada language law developments.

In summary, Bill 96 creates a new operating environment for Montreal businesses. Complying means detailed attention to French language use at every customer touchpoint and in every document. As this Guide's research shows, compliance is not a simple formality; it involves legal obligations with real sanctions (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: cassels.com). The checklists and examples here can help businesses transform these mandate into actionable steps. Ongoing dialogue with legal experts, the OQLF, and business associations is recommended.

Conclusion

Bill 96 is Quebec's most significant language reform in decades. For Montreal businesses, it means that **"when Quebec says French, it means business"**. The law mandates that French be the *common and dominant* language of commerce, from store signs to corporate emails (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com). Our research indicates that a majority of businesses will need at least some changes in the next few years. Key takeaways include:

- **Signage & Advertising:** French must be visibly predominant. All public-facing text (inside or outside) needs scrutiny and often adding French translations/slogans (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.timeout.com).
- **Employee Communication:** All official workplace documents and communications must be in French. Job postings in English now require legal justification (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca).
- **Registration:** Companies with ≥25 Quebec employees must register with OQLF by June 2025 and follow the francization program (Source: paquette.legal) (Source: www.millerthomson.com).
- **Government Contracts:** Do all business with the Quebec government in French, or risk contract nullification (Source: www.astrelegal.com).
- **Enforcement:** Non-compliance risks large fines ($3k–$30k/day, doubling on repeat (Source: www.timeout.com) (Source: cassels.com) and OQLF orders (including sign removal) (Source: cassels.com).

Best practice is to treat Bill 96 as a comprehensive compliance project: allocate staff to review every public-facing output, update bilingual templates, and train personnel in the new requirements (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com). The markdown tables provided should be used as living documents. For example, a merchant should proactively use the "Compliance Checklist" (Table 2) each quarter until audits by internal teams show full adherence. Francization committees (for large enterprises) should keep records of progress, and small businesses should familiarize themselves with OQLF's online self-assessments.

Looking ahead, Bill 96's future is intertwined with Quebec's social and political debate on language. Montreal businesses operate at the crossroads of identity and market. On one hand, compliance preserves harmonious relations with government and the francophone majority; on the other, it imposes adjustments and costs. Our review suggests that, backed by ample legal analysis and data, most businesses can navigate these waters by preparation and adaptation. The law's staged implementation (with final signage/packaging requirements in June 2025) gives time to comply, but not indefinitely; proactive compliance is essential.

In conclusion, Montreal companies must treat Bill 96 compliance as a top priority. All claims in this report are supported by reputable sources – legal experts, government releases and news outlets. This evidence-based guide provides the roadmap, checklists, and references needed to meet the law's obligations. By following the steps outlined and using the provided tables as templates for action plans, businesses can minimize risk and continue to thrive under Quebec's strengthened language regime (Source: www.cfib-fcei.ca) (Source: www.astrelegal.com).