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français?

Overcoming the Language Barrier

Key Considerations for Successfully Entering into the Quebec Real Estate Market

By Huiping Iler

For many English Canadian real estate firms, penetrating the Quebec market can be a daunting, if not problematic task given the obvious language and cultural barriers. As Canada's second largest provincial economy, approximately 80 percent of the population of Quebec speaks French as a first language—and while it's no secret that the ability to do business in French is a prerequisite for success, it's also a requirement of the law.

Quebec's Charter of the French language

The Quebec Charter of the French Language—also known as Bill 101—is designed to make French the everyday language of work, instruction, communication, commerce and all business conducted in Quebec. Any company operating in the province is required to have a French-language name and signage. In the real estate context, the use of French is legislated for contracts, property signs and advertising among other things.

Azaëlle Elliott-Bouchard is a project manager for wintranslation, a Canadian translation company serving the real estate sector. With clients, including Skyline Group of Companies, Bridgeport Realty, Keller Williams Realty, and CREIT Management LP to name a few, she knows the importance of good and meaningful translation.

“When our clients expand into Quebec, they usually translate employee manuals, leases, fire and safety documents from English into French,” she says. “While these need to be accurate and true to the content, they also need to reflect the new market in which they will be used. They shouldn’t come off sounding like direct translations.”

Speaking the real, local language

The quality of all corporate communications—whether it is website content or a recruitment ad—reflects a company’s commitment to the market in which it is immersed. After all, customers are known to make emotional choices rather than purely logical ones. “Nothing ruins an emotional connection with your clients more than awkward, subpar translations,” notes Elliott-Bouchard.

Martin Messier, president of the Quebec Landlords Association—and a Quebec resident himself—agrees. “Many companies do a good job being compliant with the French language requirements, but often they don’t do it very well,” he says. “For example, sometimes the translation is in French but not Québécois French. Quebecers pick up on the failure to recognize local nuances. Working with a qualified translator, and communicating using beautifully written French content on websites and collaterals will go a long way in creating stronger bonds with customers in our market.”

What makes a good translator?

According to Elliott-Bouchard, good translators are writers who produce texts that read well in French. “Their most important skill set is building effective bridges between languages,” she notes. “They render the message of the original English text, with appropriate style and terminology in French.”

One tip Elliott-Bouchard suggests to ensure relevant language usage is to create terminology databases specific to a client’s industry and services, then have a second translator review the translation quality.

Include translation in content planning

One of the problems that Elliot-Bouchard often sees is that translation is an afterthought. Communication professionals with very little experience dealing with translations often forget to build in the time needed for translation into their planning process.

Sometimes she gets calls to “convert” 10,000 English words into French, literally overnight. Last minute translation requests almost always increase costs and impair quality. Translators need time to research proper terminology and compose the French text. Translations intended for publications should also be proofread and revised by a second translator, which requires additional time. The industry rule of thumb is a translator can translate about 2,000 words per day and a reviser can revise between 800 and 1,000 words per hour.

This article was written by Huiping Iler, President, wintranslation

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