



AUTO ATTENDANT / RESEARCH & PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

Quebec's French Language Charter and Your Phone Greeting

Get a business phone number with a simple auto attendant menu from Auto Attendant. A caller picks who they need and the call rings that person's own mobile, so nobody on your team has to publish a personal number.

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The short answer

No section of Quebec's Charter of the French Language mentions telephones or voicemail, but your greeting falls under the general rule that customers in Quebec have a right to be informed and served in French. The Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF), which enforces the Charter, says in its language-advice pages that business greetings must be in French, with priority to French when you add another language.

Below: what the law says, what is guidance or our own reading, and French-first scripts that still work for English callers. Section numbers are from the consolidated Charter (CQLR c C-11), up to date to 15 October 2026 ([LégisQuébec](#)). We quote the English version; if the two versions conflict, the French text prevails ([s. 7.1](#)). Everything is as of October 2026.

This is educational information, not legal advice. For a specific situation, ask a Quebec lawyer or contact the OQLF.

Does the Charter regulate your phone greeting?

Not by name. We searched the full consolidated text for "telephone", "voice" and "oral". The only hits were about government bodies, professional orders and recognized institutions. Nothing covers a private business's phone line ([Charter, CQLR c C-11](#)).

Two general rules still reach your phone line:

- **Section 5:** "Consumers of goods and services have a right to be informed and served in French." This has been the rule since 1977 ([s. 5](#)).
- **Section 50.2:** Bill 96 added this in 2022. It turns that right into a duty on the business. "An enterprise that offers goods or services to consumers must respect their right to be informed and served in French." The second paragraph covers business customers: "An enterprise that offers goods or services to a public other than consumers must inform and serve it in French" ([s. 50.2](#)).

A greeting informs callers and a menu is part of serving them, so the safe reading is that both fall under ss. 5 and 50.2. The OQLF goes further in its *Vitrine linguistique* (its public language-help service). It writes that for businesses, "in accordance with the Charter of the French Language, greeting messages must be in French. If you wish to use another language, you must in all cases give priority to French" (OQLF, *Vitrine linguistique*; our translation).

That is the regulator's advice, but it sits in a writing guide, not in the statute or a regulation. The practical takeaway: **start in French, and make French service available on every call.**

Who the Charter applies to

The Quebec government says the Charter applies to all businesses and shops operating in Quebec ([Québec.ca](#)). Éducaloi, a Quebec legal-education nonprofit, describes the scope as any self-employed person, company or organization, for-profit or not, that offers products or services in Quebec, subject to exceptions ([Éducaloi](#)).

So it is not only shops with a Montreal or Quebec City address. An Ontario contractor taking jobs in Gatineau, or an online store listing a support number for Quebec buyers, also serves Quebec customers.

The OQLF draws one limit itself. The Charter does not require Quebec businesses to speak French with customers outside Quebec. For Quebec customers, a business "may serve them in the language they choose. However, service in French must be available at all times" (OQLF, *Charte de la langue française : mythes et réalité*; our translation).

What the law says about serving customers in French

The OQLF's guide for businesses sums up the language of service in four points (OQLF *aide-mémoire*; our translation):

1. Serving customers in French in Quebec is mandatory.
2. If you also serve in another language, French service must be available on at least the same terms. This applies whether the customer is a person or another business.
3. Consumers already had the right to be served in French. Since Bill 96, businesses have a duty to respect it and must offer French service at all times.
4. About a third of the complaints the OQLF receives are about businesses not serving in French.

Applied to a phone line, "at least the same terms" suggests a few design rules. These are our inference, not quoted law:

- A French caller should not have to wait longer, press more keys or sit through more English than an English caller.
- If English callers reach a person, French callers should be able to reach someone who can serve them in French.
- After-hours and holiday messages need French too, because "at all times" has no business-hours exception.

The fewer-than-five-employees exception (s. 204.17)

Section 204.17 lets a person whose rights under ss. 2 to 6.2 were violated "obtain the cessation of the violation". In plain terms, they can go to court to make it stop. The second paragraph says this does not apply to a violation of s. 5 by a consumer-facing enterprise "that employed fewer than five persons at the time of the violation" (s. 204.17).

Read the wording closely. It removes **one remedy**, a cessation order, against very small businesses. It does not change the s. 50.2 duty, which has no size limit. Nor does it touch the OQLF's power to order compliance under s. 177, which has no size limit either, or the fines for ignoring such an order (below). The text says so on its face; no court has ruled on it. Éducaloi frames the practical result as businesses with at least five employees needing enough staff with adequate French to serve customers (Éducaloi). A recorded greeting costs nothing to translate, so even a two-person business has little reason not to start it in French.

How enforcement works

- **Complaints:** anyone can file a complaint with the OQLF online (OQLF, [Plaintes et dénonciations](#)). The OQLF says it received more than 10,000 complaints in the year before its 1 May 2026 release (OQLF [news release, 1 May 2026](#)).
- **Orders:** if the OQLF finds a failure to comply, it may order the business to comply or stop the contravention by a deadline. Where the Act respecting administrative justice applies, it must first give at least 15 days' written notice (s. 177).
- **Fines:** contravening an OQLF order under s. 177 is an offence. The fine is \$700 to \$7,000 for an individual and \$3,000 to \$30,000 for a company (s. 205). Fines double for a second offence and triple after that (s. 207). Each day an offence continues counts as a separate offence (s. 208.0.1).

In practice the OQLF often starts with a conversation. In its 2025 operation in nearly 1,000 Montreal-area shops, French service was available in 98% of them. The OQLF contacted the 23% of businesses with at least one item to fix, and by the release date 70% of the requested corrections had been made (OQLF [news release, 1 May 2026](#)).

Bilingual greetings: French first, French always available

A bilingual greeting is allowed. The Charter does not ban other languages, and the OQLF confirms you may serve Quebec customers in the language they choose (OQLF, [mythes et réalité](#)).

The OQLF also gives a pattern for centralized phone services such as customer service lines. The message starts in French, gives a short instruction in English (or another language) on how to get service in that language, then returns to French. Its example is a French greeting with a French extension prompt, "For information service in English, press 1," and then the office hours in French (OQLF, [Vitrine linguistique](#)).

Our design guidance, based on that pattern and on ss. 5 and 50.2 (inference, not law):

Decision	French-first approach	Riskier approach
First words a caller hears	French	English, or a long English greeting with a French option later
Language choice	One short English instruction inside the French greeting	"For French, press 2" after a full English menu
French path	Same options and same people (or French-capable backups) as English	Fewer options in French, or French goes straight to voicemail
Closed-hours message	French first, then English	English only
Voicemail greetings for staff	French first, then English	English only

Keep it short: the OQLF says a greeting should be concise, since the shorter it is, the more acceptable the wait ([OQLF, Message d'accueil](#)). Two full languages back to back double the wait; one English sentence inside a French greeting does not. A third language, such as Spanish, can follow the English option.

For menu structure in general, see our guide to [building a bilingual auto-attendant menu](#).

Employees and the right to work in French

Your phone setup also touches the people who answer calls.

- **Section 4:** "Workers have a right to carry on their activities in French" ([s. 4](#)).
- **Section 41:** employers must respect that right. In particular, job offers, written employment contracts, written staff communications, application forms, documents about working conditions and staff training documents must be in French. If another version exists, the French one must be available on terms at least as favourable ([s. 41](#)). A phone script or call-handling guide you give staff is arguably a training document. That is our inference, but it is cheap to comply with.
- **Section 46:** an employer may not require knowledge of a language other than French for a position unless the duties need it. Even then, the employer must first take all reasonable means to avoid the requirement, and the job posting must give the reasons ([s. 46](#)).

Section 46 matters when you staff a bilingual line. The Quebec government says you must have assessed the real language needs of the tasks, checked that skills already required of other staff are not enough, and kept the number of such positions as low as possible ([Québec.ca](#)). One clean setup: route the English option to the one or two people whose roles genuinely need English, rather than requiring English of everyone who answers.

Signs, invoices, websites and documents

Your phone greeting is one piece. For completeness, here are the other customer-facing rules the Quebec government lists for businesses ([Québec.ca](#)):

What	Rule	Section
Product labels, packaging, instructions, warranties, menus and wine lists	In French; translations allowed, but no other language more prominent	s. 51
Catalogues, brochures, order forms and similar documents, in any medium	In French; another-language version only if French is available on terms at least as favourable	s. 52
Contracts of adhesion (standard-form contracts)	French version must be given first; another language only at the parties' express wish after that	s. 55
Invoices, receipts and similar documents	In French, or French available on terms at least as favourable	s. 57
Public signs and commercial advertising	In French, or bilingual with French "markedly predominant"	s. 58

Since 1 June 2025, French must be markedly predominant on any business name or trademark displayed so that it is visible from outside a business ([OQLF news release, 1 May 2026](#)). The OQLF also says websites and social media must be available in French and may also be in other languages ([OQLF, mythes et réalité](#)).

If your website lists a phone number, make sure the French page shows the same number and hours.

Francization at 25 or more employees

An enterprise that employs 25 or more people for six months must register with the OQLF within six months after that period. It then analyses its language situation and, if needed, adopts a francization program ([s. 139](#), [s. 140](#); [OQLF, démarche de francisation](#)). Before Bill 96 the threshold was 50 employees. Businesses with 25 to 49 employees have been covered since 1 June 2025, the date the new text of s. 139 took effect ([s. 139](#), [version history](#); [OQLF aide-mémoire](#)).

A francization program covers, among other things, "the use of French in communications with ... clients, suppliers, the public" ([s. 141](#)), so expect greetings, menus and voicemail to be part of the review.

Practical script examples (design guidance, not legal advice)

These scripts follow the OQLF's pattern: French first, a short instruction in English, then back to French. Replace the name, hours and options with your own. Use "faites le" rather than "signalez", and "poste" rather than "extension". The OQLF lists "Signalez 9" and "Extension 24" as forms to avoid ([OQLF, mots et expressions à privilégier en téléphonie](#)).

Main greeting (open hours)

Bonjour, vous êtes bien chez Plomberie Marchand. Pour le service, faites le 1. Pour la facturation, faites le 2. Pour toute autre demande, faites le 3. For service in English, press 9. Merci de votre appel.

English menu (after pressing 9)

Thank you for calling Plomberie Marchand. For service, press 1. For billing, press 2. For anything else, press 3. Pour revenir au menu en français, faites le 0.

Closed hours

Bonjour, vous êtes bien chez Plomberie Marchand. Nos bureaux sont fermés. Nous sommes ouverts du lundi au vendredi, de 8 h à 17 h. Laissez-nous un message après le signal sonore, et nous vous rappellerons le jour ouvrable suivant. You have reached Plomberie Marchand. Our office is closed. Please leave a message after the tone and we will call you back the next business day.

Individual voicemail

Bonjour, vous êtes bien dans la boîte vocale de Julie Tremblay. Laissez-moi votre nom et votre numéro, et je vous rappellerai dès que possible. You've reached Julie Tremblay. Please leave your name and number.

Writing tips:

- Use Quebec time style in French: "8 h 30", "de 13 h à 16 h 30".
- Say "rappeler", not "retourner un appel". The OQLF lists the second as a form to avoid (**OQLF**).
- Have a fluent French speaker listen to the result; machine voices stumble on names and numbers.

Quick checklist

- [] The first words callers hear are French.
- [] English (or another language) is offered in one short sentence, not a second full greeting.
- [] Every option in the English menu exists in the French menu.
- [] French callers can reach someone who can serve them in French, or leave a French voicemail that gets answered.
- [] Closed-hours, holiday and overflow messages start in French.
- [] Staff voicemail greetings start in French.
- [] The phone number and hours match on the French and English website pages.
- [] Staff phone scripts and call-handling guides exist in French.
- [] Any job ad requiring English for phone work states the reasons (s. 46).

FAQ

Can I serve a customer in English if they ask? Yes. The OQLF says businesses may serve Quebec customers in the language the customer chooses, as long as French service is available at all times (**OQLF, mythes et réalité**). Éducaloi puts it the same way: you can keep serving in English if the customer wants it, provided they don't ask to be served in French (**Éducaloi**).

Is a bilingual greeting enough? A bilingual greeting is necessary but not sufficient. The duty is to inform *and* serve in French (**s. 50.2**). If pressing 1 for French leads to a voicemail box nobody checks while English callers reach a person, the greeting is fine but the service is not. That is our reading of the "same terms" principle in

the [OQLF aide-mémoire](#).

Does "Bonjour-Hi" work on the phone? No Charter section or OQLF page we found addresses this exact wording. The OQLF's guidance asks for French first, with the other language as a short instruction. In our reading, a greeting that opens "Bonjour, hi" and then continues in French fits that pattern. One that opens "Bonjour, hi" and then continues mostly in English does not.

I have three employees. Does any of this apply to me? The s. 50.2 duty has no size threshold. The fewer-than-five carve-out in s. 204.17 only removes a customer's court action for a cessation order on s. 5 ([s. 204.17](#)). That is our reading, not a court ruling. Francization registration starts at 25 employees ([s. 139](#)).

Who enforces this? The OQLF. It takes complaints, runs inspections, and can issue orders backed by fines ([OQLF, Plaintes et dénonciations](#); [s. 177](#); [s. 205](#)). Employees not covered by a collective agreement can complain to the CNESST about prohibited language practices ([Québec.ca](#)).

For more on Canadian numbers and area codes, see our [Canada page](#). Auto Attendant menus can play in English, French and Spanish, and numbers with Quebec area codes start in French.

Sources

All sources were opened on 2026-10-28; pages that block automated requests were read through a scraping proxy (firecrawl).

1. [Charter of the French Language, CQLR c C-11 \(consolidated, up to date to 15 October 2026\)](#), Publications du Québec / LégisQuébec.
2. [Obligations des commerces, des entreprises, des ordres professionnels et de l'Administration en matière de langue française](#), Gouvernement du Québec ([Québec.ca](#)), last updated 5 August 2026.
3. [Votre aide-mémoire pour faire des affaires en français au Québec](#), Office québécois de la langue française.
4. [Charte de la langue française : mythes et réalité](#), Office québécois de la langue française.
5. [L'OQLF dévoile les résultats d'une opération menée sur de grandes artères commerciales](#), OQLF news release, 1 May 2026.
6. [Système de réponse vocale interactif, répondeur et boîte vocale](#), OQLF Vitrine linguistique (Banque de dépannage linguistique).
7. [Message d'accueil](#), OQLF Vitrine linguistique.
8. [Mots et expressions à privilégier en téléphonie](#), OQLF Vitrine linguistique.
9. [Exigences linguistiques pour exploiter une entreprise au Québec](#), Éducaloi.
10. [Plaintes et dénonciations](#), Office québécois de la langue française.
11. [Démarche de francisation : entreprises employant 25 personnes ou plus](#), Office québécois de la langue française.

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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2. <https://vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/23273/la-redaction-et-la-communication/communications-telephoniques/systeme-de-reponse-vocale-interactif-repondeur-et-boite-vocale>
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THE PUBLISHER

About Auto Attendant

Auto Attendant gives a small business one phone number and a recorded menu that sends each caller to the right person. The call rings the mobile that person already carries, using their normal dialler and their normal mobile plan. Pricing is a single flat monthly fee for the whole company rather than a charge for each user, and there is no app, desk phone or hardware to install.

One number, one menu, the phones you already own

A caller dials the business number, hears a short greeting and chooses an option. Each option can ring one mobile, ring several at once so whoever is free answers first, or try people one after another in a set order. There is no limit on how many people sit on the receiving end, because nobody is billed per seat. Setup is done by the owner in a few minutes: pick a number, write the greeting, and point each option at a mobile.

What it deliberately is not

An auto attendant routes a call; it does not answer one. Nobody at Auto Attendant speaks to callers, and no AI stands in for a receptionist. A business that wants its calls handled, messages taken and appointments booked wants an answering service, which is a different product at a different price. A business that needs call recording, queues, agent dashboards or CRM integration wants a contact centre platform. Auto Attendant is for the case where the call should simply reach the right pocket.

Keeping personal numbers off the internet

The business number is the only number a caller ever sees. Personal mobile numbers are never displayed and never given out, which is what lets an owner put a number on a website, an invoice, a van or a Google Business Profile without handing a personal line to everyone who finds it. An existing advertised number can be ported across and kept, and the old line keeps working while the port is in progress.

Work with Auto Attendant

Visit [Auto Attendant](#) to see [how it works](#), [how it compares](#) to a personal mobile, Google Voice and a full phone platform, and the current [pricing](#).

Telephone number portability, emergency calling and caller-ID rules differ by country and change over time. Articles published here describe general practice and cite primary regulator and carrier sources; they are not a guarantee of any timeline, and they are not legal or regulatory advice for a specific business.

Website: <https://autoattendant.io>

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