

# FRENCH CANADA 2017

**The Digital Distinctions that Set  
Quebec Apart**

**MAY 2017**

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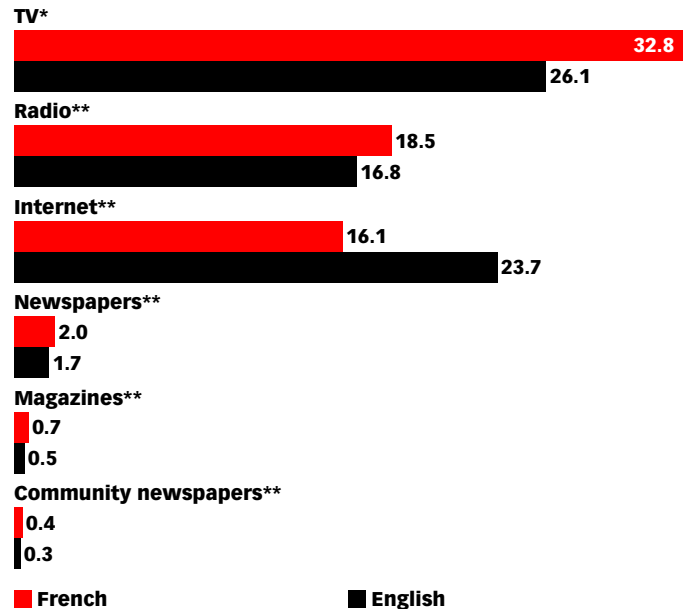
# FRENCH CANADA 2017: THE DIGITAL DISTINCTIONS THAT SET QUEBEC APART

Like many other aspects of Quebec's culture, media usage in the province stands distinct from the rest of Canada. Due to their language and socioeconomic level, Francophone Quebecers spend less time with digital media than other Canadians do, and more time with traditional media, particularly TV. For brands, striking an authentic local tone and tapping into the province's unique celebrity "star system" has helped gain favor with consumers there.

- Quebec is accelerating investment in its digital economy, an effort to improve consumer access and help local businesses navigate the transition from more traditional business models. The provincial government has allotted significant public dollars to prop up the newspaper industry and improve ecommerce options for consumers.
- Francophone Quebecers spent just 16.1 hours per week on the internet in 2015 and 2016, vs. 23.7 hours for Anglophones in the rest of Canada. A major factor is a relative lack of French digital programming and services. A slightly more rural population and lower disposable incomes compared with other provinces also contribute.
- Digital ad spending in French Canada is disproportionately low as a share of total digital spending in Canada. This is partly due to national and international advertisers fearing violations of local language laws. But it has more to do with the need for better user targeting by behavior rather than the language of the content they consume.
- For brands, hitting the right cultural note in campaigns requires an authentic Quebec approach. It's typically one that capitalizes on a local celebrity star system and leverages local media.

**WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT?** This report examines consumer time spent with digital media in Quebec, the trends in digital advertising in the province and how brands can increase their effectiveness in engaging Quebecers.

## Weekly Time Spent with Media Among Consumers in Canada, by Language, 2015-2016 hours



Note: ages 18+; \*Numeris PPM in Quebec Franco for French and all Canada (minus Quebec Franco) for English, Mon-Sun 2am-2am, by 2015/2016 (Aug 31, 2015-Aug 28, 2016); \*\*Numeris RTS from spring 2016  
Source: comScore Media Metrix Multi-Platform, Numeris PPM and Numeris RTS, "Reach & Time Spent: Major Media Comparison - Canada 2015-2016 Broadcast Year" as cited by Thinktv (formerly Television Bureau of Canada (TVB)), Sep 23, 2016

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**KEY STAT:** French-speaking consumers in Canada spent an average of 7.6 hours per week less with the internet in 2015 and 2016 than English speakers in Canada, highlighting Quebec's digital gap.

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## QUEBEC'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

**At a time when businesses worldwide are planning for digital transformation, the province of Quebec is attempting to orchestrate such a shift at the societal level. To close its digital gap compared with the rest of Canada, the provincial government has announced financial support for industries amid disruption, like retail and media. Voices in the private sector have sounded more ambitious calls for homegrown digital services to combat the disruptive forces from abroad.**

Alexandre Taillefer is one such voice, telling the Forum Culture + Numérique (Culture and Digital Forum) in March 2017 that Quebec should create local services to compete with Facebook and Google: “If we do not try to develop a similar model here ... we will essentially allow third parties to control what we are going to consume. It is about the future of the French language, and it is about the future of Quebec.”

Taillefer gained fame in Quebec as a “dragon” on “Dans l’œil du Dragon,” the French-language version of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reality TV show “Dragons’ Den” (similar to “Shark Tank” in the US). But it’s his investment in Quebec media, including the newspaper Voir and the magazine L’actualité, and his backing of Montreal’s Teo—a hybrid ride service that borrows features from Uber—that have earned him credibility as Quebec’s foremost advocate for digital transformation.

“In Quebec, we are letting foreign giants take up more and more space. ... This is worrying for private information, it is worrying for taxation, but also for information and local traders,” said Taillefer in a March 2017 interview with Infopresse Publishing, a Montreal-based business media company.

Taillefer’s public statements, even if they sound naïve or imply an intention to “balkanize Quebec”—to use his own words—have captured the attention of digital executives and public officials. In the perceived absence of private sector innovation, the Quebec government, which has a long history of socialist-leaning policies, has recently announced funding intended to spur innovation. In 2017’s budget, the provincial legislature earmarked CA\$24 million (\$18.1 million) for a print media assistance fund and a further CA\$12 million (\$9.1 million) in tax breaks to help newspapers shift to digital. In the same budget, Dominique Anglade, Quebec’s minister for digital strategy, announced CA\$5 million (\$3.8 million) in funding to support retailer efforts in ecommerce.

Critics of such government injections point to private sector examples of innovation in Quebec that didn’t require assistance from the public purse. For instance, Montreal’s La Presse newspaper successfully transitioned away from daily print editions in 2015, replacing them with a free tablet-only format, La Presse+. By the end of 2016, it reached a weekly audience exceeding 420,000 unique tablet users, up 18.7% during the year. Users spend an average of 40 minutes per day with the tablet edition, according to the company.

“La Presse made the decision to abandon the print version during weekdays and only keep the Saturday edition,” said Éric Blais, president of Headspace Marketing, an agency that helps national and international brands market in Quebec. “This is how Quebecers of all ages now access their news from La Presse, the leading French publication in North America.”

Blais said key to the La Presse+ success has been advertiser buy-in, and his firm advises clients to leverage its audience. “Advertisers have been shown how to take full advantage of the interactive capabilities of the platform, and you can see it in the way the ads are designed,” he said.

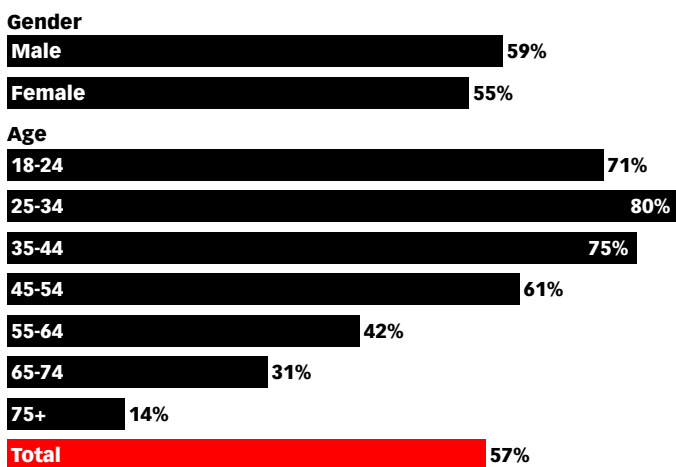
Private sector innovation in Quebec ecommerce, the other major public funding project, is also in strong evidence. Clothing and accessories company Frank + Oak is the poster child for omnichannel retail success in Montreal; and Beyond the Rack, prior to its current financial difficulties, was an early innovator in building a membership of millions of online shoppers. Yet, Anglade estimated that only 14% of retailers in Quebec sell online and more than 1,300 retailers will benefit from the provincial support.

“The funding is a drop in the ocean,” said Rudy Abitbol, vice president of marketing and growth for North America at altima, a Montreal-based agency focusing on ecommerce. “You have 1,300 retailers; that’s around \$4,000 per retailer. We’re not going to be able to do anything in terms of business solutions or just the basic inventory synchronization.”

Local participation in ecommerce trails the rest of Canada. According to Cefrio, the province’s leading digital researcher, 57% of digital buyers polled in Quebec made a digital purchase in 2016. eMarketer estimates that 70.2% of the country—including Quebec, which means penetration in the rest of the country is even higher—made a digital purchase in 2016.

Language is just one of a confluence of factors—the others include socioeconomics and the massive impact of local TV—that has held up digital transformation in Quebec and created a digital gap compared with the rest of Canada.

**Demographic Profile of Digital Buyers in Quebec, 2016**  
*% of population in each group*



*Note: n=1,000; in the past 12 months*  
*Source: Cefrio, "Le commerce électronique au Québec," March 22, 2017*  
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Another factor holding back Quebec ecommerce relates to language. The Office québécois de la langue française, which enforces Quebec’s language law, requires a fully French website to sell online in the province. For international retailers, investing in a French-language website to serve this limited market is rarely justifiable.

“We have international brands that are ready to sell online, that have customers in Quebec, but that do not have a website in French,” said Abitbol. “Club Monaco never translated their website in French, even though it has stores in Quebec. That’s why they do not sell online in Quebec.”

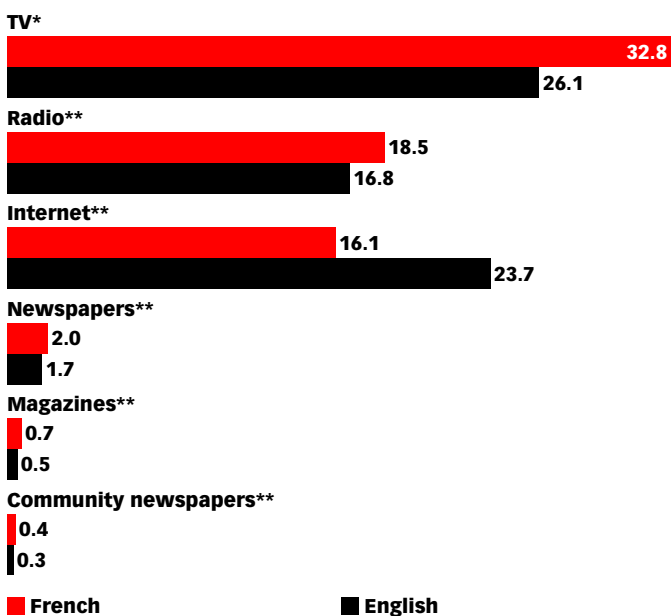
# QUANTIFYING QUEBEC'S DIGITAL GAP

**For as long as such data has been tracked, time spent with digital media among Francophone Quebecers has been significantly lower compared with the rest of Canada. In addition, French speakers spend more time with traditional media including TV, radio, magazines and newspapers.**

According to comScore Media Metrix and Numeris data summarizing 2015 and 2016, Francophone adults watched 32.8 hours of TV weekly on average, compared with 26.1 hours for Anglophones, a difference of 26%. Radio time is 10% greater among Francophones, and 18% greater for print newspapers. Time spent with the internet shows an even greater digital gap: French-speaking consumers in Canada spent just 16.1 hours per week on the web, vs. 23.7 hours for English-speaking consumers, a difference of around 32%.

## Weekly Time Spent with Media Among Consumers in Canada, by Language, 2015-2016

hours



Note: ages 18+; \*Numeris PPM in Quebec Franco for French and all Canada (minus Quebec Franco) for English, Mon-Sun 2am-2am, by 2015/2016 (Aug 31, 2015-Aug 28, 2016); \*\*Numeris RTS from spring 2016  
Source: comScore Media Metrix Multi-Platform, Numeris PPM and Numeris RTS, "Reach & Time Spent: Major Media Comparison - Canada 2015-2016 Broadcast Year" as cited by Thinktv (formerly Television Bureau of Canada (TVB)), Sep 23, 2016

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Both language and socioeconomics explain this gap, at least partially. Monolingual Francophones have a harder time finding rich content options in their native tongue, and therefore spend less time combing through the internet and more time with local TV.

"Although the population would skew to 70-plus percent French speaking, the actual usage of digital media is about half done in English," said Mario Lemieux, president and partner of DAC Group Canada, a performance marketing firm. "What this tells us is you've got a number of Francophones using the web in English only, especially in urban areas."

Unilingual French speakers are more likely to live in rural communities in Quebec, where internet access is less built out and mobile speeds don't compare with urban centers, factors that suppress adoption rates. According to Statistics Canada's 2011 Census, 19% of Quebec's population was rural, compared with 14% in both Ontario and British Columbia.

Another factor is that Quebecers on average have less disposable income than consumers in the rest of Canada. According to Statistics Canada reporting on the 2011 Census (2016 census data on incomes wasn't released at time of publishing), Quebec median household income was CA\$68,170, 6% below the national average.

Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) and Angus Reid Forum polling from early December 2016 showed adults in Quebec planned to spend less money on holiday shopping compared with all other regions in Canada. Quebecers planned to spend an average of CA\$406 (\$318), well below Atlantic Canada (CA\$803; \$628), Alberta (CA\$688; \$538), Ontario (CA\$670; \$524), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (CA\$647; \$506) and British Columbia (CA\$529; \$414).

## MOBILE HELPS BRIDGE THE GAP

Mobile access to the internet accounts for the majority of digital time that French-speaking adults spend online. According to PHD Canada's Canadian Media Usage Trends (CMUST) 2016 report, 54.0% of weekly internet time for French-speaking adults in Canada was mobile, which included smartphone and tablets. Another 26.1% of share time was via desktop/laptop. The remaining share of time spent (19.9%) was through smart TVs and other connected devices.

## Weekly Time Spent Online Among French-Speaking Adults in Canada, by Device, 2016

	Weekly time spent online (minutes)	% of total
<b>Mobile (smartphone/tablet)</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>54.0%</b>
—Nonvideo*	620	-
—Video	400	-
<b>Desktop/laptop</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>26.1%</b>
—Nonvideo*	264	-
—Video*	230	-
<b>Connected TV device (e.g., smart TV)</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>9.5%</b>
<b>Game console</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>3.6%</b>
<b>Audio (desktop/laptop/mobile)</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>3.2%</b>
<b>Wearables</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>2.3%</b>
<b>Connected car</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,890</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: ages 18+; per capita; \*data from comScore MMX Multi-Platform, May 2016

Source: PHD Canada, "Intermedia Intramedia: CMUST 2016 - French Canada" commissioned by Interactive Advertising Bureau of Canada (IAB Canada); eMarketer calculations, Jan 26, 2017

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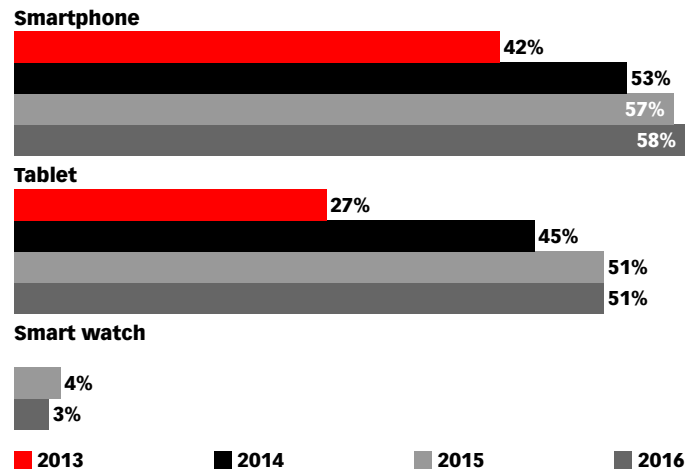
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Despite mobile's leading share of time spent, smartphone penetration among Francophones is markedly less than that of Anglophones in Canada, according to the CMUST report. Among adults, 65% reported owning a smartphone, compared with 75% of respondents in the country as a whole.

However, smartphone penetration in Quebec is growing, according to Cefrio: smartphone penetration went from 42% in 2013 to 58% in 2016. Over the same period, tablet adoption almost doubled, climbing from 27% to 51%. Both smartphone and tablet growth stalled somewhat in 2016, suggesting it's nearing saturation.

## Mobile Device Ownership Among Consumers in Quebec, by Device, 2013-2016

% of respondents



Note: ages 18+

Source: Cefrio, "Portrait Numérique Des Foyers Québécois," Nov 3, 2016

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"We're seeing a big shift to mobile," said Arnaud Granata, president and publisher of Infopresse, whose business audience likely skews more digital than the general population. "We know that a lot of our readers are on their mobile phone during the morning. As a result, we've shifted all the content to a new platform that supports heavy mobile usage."

## QUEBEC'S TV HABIT

The most reliable source of French content in Quebec is TV. It still dominates media time share and achieves ratings unseen in other Canadian markets. Television time in Quebec is driven by two main networks: Quebecor's TVA and Radio-Canada, the French version of the CBC.

"The typical TV show that is very popular in French Canada can garner north of a million viewers a week," said Hector Pantazopoulos, chief revenue officer of SourceKnowledge, a Montreal-based ad tech firm. "In a market of 8 million people, that is incredible penetration. You don't really get that type of penetration in English Canada. In terms of the viewership and the types of content that French Canadians consume, TV is still king."

Shows like "Tout le Monde en Parle" (a talk show) and "La Voix" (the local version of NBC's "The Voice") regularly exceed 1 million viewers.

With 60% market share, Quebec is the No. 1 global market in terms of penetration for "The Voice" franchise.

The success of “La Voix” highlights a unique aspect of Francophone Quebec—its “star system,” as the local celebrity culture is described in Quebec. Homegrown Quebec stars drive much of the successful programming, and brands invest heavily in using them for brand advertising.

“Quebec has a culture of creating its own star system because of the language,” said Marc Tanguay, Quebec’s sales manager at ad tech firm Crucial Interactive. “It’s a province that’s constantly looking in, as opposed to looking out, while the rest of Canada perhaps knows a lot of American celebrities. Those well-known American celebrities aren’t known in Quebec. Even Canadian celebrities sometimes aren’t known in Quebec.”

In any region, the main competition to television is streaming video, but in Quebec, the threat is less urgent. Cord-cutting in Quebec is not that common: Only 8% of pay TV subscribers polled by Cefrio in the spring of 2016 said they were “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to cancel a cable TV subscription in the next year.

Netflix adoption in Quebec trails the rest of Canada, mainly due to the limited library selection in French. According to Media Technology Monitor’s spring 2016 survey, only 20% of Francophone adults reported subscribing, compared with 42% of Anglophones in Canada. Looking at the ways to watch Netflix—connected TV, desktop, tablet and smartphone—French adult respondents were about half or less than half as likely to do so.

**Netflix Subscribers and Viewers Among Adults in Canada, by Age and Language, Spring 2016**  
% of respondents in each group

	French		Total	
	18-34	18+	18-34	18+
Subscribe	36%	20%	59%	42%
Watch weekly	30%	15%	55%	36%
Watch monthly	30%	15%	55%	37%

Source: Media Technology Monitor, “Spring 2016 Survey” as cited by PHD Canada, “Intermedia Intramedia: CMUST 2016 - French Canada,” Jan 26, 2017

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“Even though we have good penetration on Netflix in terms of French Canadians, the content is very limited on Netflix, not at all on par with English,” said Thierry Gauthier, vice president of client services at McCann Montreal. “There is a discussion here going on in Quebec among TV executives for working together to fight Netflix, and create a strong Francophone streaming media platform.”

The opportunity for native language services to enter the market for streaming video in French is clear, and Quebec-based digital video services have gained some traction. Vidéotron reported that its digital video offering illico.tv, also known as Club Illico, gained 36,000 new subscribers in Q4 2016 to bring its base to 315,000. Revenues for the service were up 33% in 2016, fueled by high viewership rates for original programming it produced, including the hit series “Blue Moon.”

According to a September 2016 Centre d’études sur les medias survey of top digital platforms used by internet users in Quebec to consume audio/video content, illico.tv had a 14% penetration rate. Another Quebec-based digital video service, Radio-Canada’s Ici Tou.tv, was used by 17% of respondents. YouTube topped the list, reported by 65% of respondents, followed by Netflix, which had a 27% rate.

**Digital Platforms Used by Internet Users in Quebec to Consume Audio/Video Content, Sep 2016**  
% of respondents

YouTube	65%
Netflix	27%
Ici Tou.tv	17%
Spotify	15%
illico.tv	14%
Google Play Music	13%
Apple Music	10%
Stingray Music for mobile	8%
CraveTV	5%
Ici Musique	3%
Shomi	2%
CBC Music	2%
Streaming/free stations on the internet	1%
iTunes	0%
Other	2%
Does not use any digital platform	22%

Note: in the past year; includes films, music, TV series, videos, web series  
Source: Centre d’études sur les medias, “L’opinion des Québécois à l’égard des plateformes numériques” conducted by Crop, Nov 18, 2016

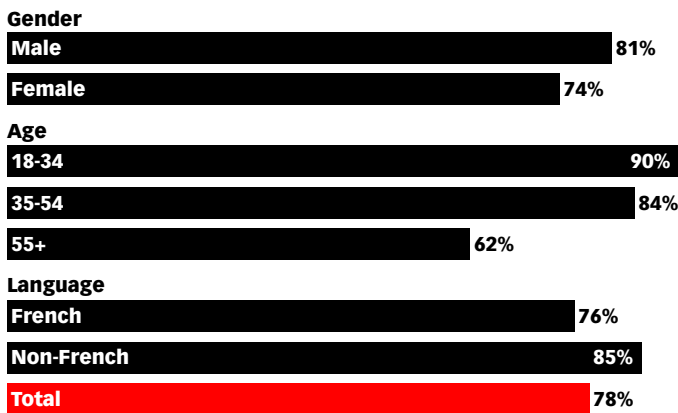
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In all, 78% of internet users in Quebec consumed content on digital platforms, according to the study. More specifically, males did so more often than females (81% vs. 74%), as did younger groups (90% of 18- to 34-year-olds compared with 62% of those 55 and older). More than three-quarters (76%) of French speakers consumed this content, compared with 85% for non-French speakers.

## Internet Users in Quebec Who Consume Audio/Video Content via Digital Platforms, by Demographic, Sep 2016

% of respondents in each group



Note: in the past year; includes films, music, TV series, videos, web series  
Source: Centre d'études sur les médias, "L'opinion des Québécois à l'égard des plateformes numériques" conducted by Crop, Nov 18, 2016

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"Video content in French Canada is harder to come by and, therefore, has a higher price tag on it," said Tanguay. "They're really just consuming homegrown stuff, within the borders of Quebec."

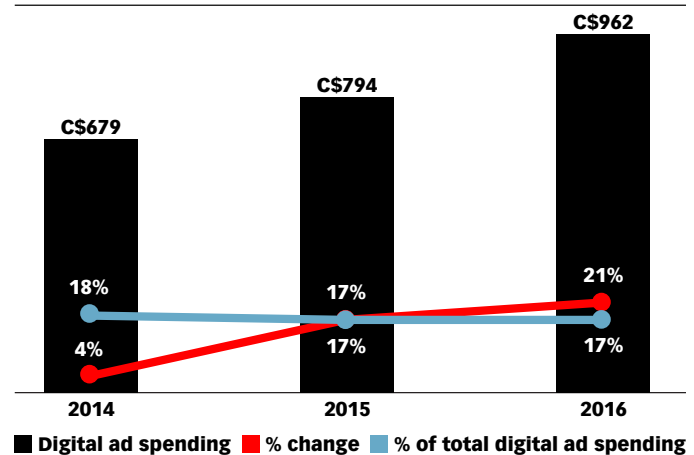
As discussed above, cord-cutting has not yet become that common in Quebec. Broadcast revenues from Quebec's largest media company underlines the enduring strength of TV in Quebec. Fourth-quarter reporting from Quebecor highlighted 7% growth in broadcasting revenues and a 9% increase in broadcast advertising revenues.

## THE IMPACT ON DIGITAL ADVERTISING

French Canada's digital gap has repercussions when it comes to French-language digital ad spending figures. According to Interactive Advertising Bureau of Canada's (IAB Canada's) "Internet Advertising Revenue Survey," conducted by EY, French-language digital advertising accounted for 17% of total digital ad spending in Canada in 2016, but French is the mother tongue to 22% of Canada's population.

### French-Language Digital Ad Spending in Canada, 2014-2016

millions of C\$, % change and % of total digital ad spending



Note: includes online and mobile (smartphones and tablets); excludes agency commissions

Source: Interactive Advertising Bureau of Canada (IAB Canada), "2015 Actual + 2016 Estimated Canadian Internet Advertising Revenue Survey" conducted by EY, Sep 12, 2016

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"The gap has been there for a minimum of 10 years," said Samuel Parent, president of consultancy Titan Interactive and the former IAB Canada director for Quebec. "It just goes to prove where Quebecers are surfing the web, and it's increasingly less [often] in French. Quebecers flock to the content they want, which is slightly more English than French. The gap is a reflection of that behavior."

IAB Canada estimated that French-language digital ad spending reached CA\$962 million (\$752.44 million) in 2016, up 21% from the year before. What's more, spending is accelerating: Annual growth was 17% in 2015 after just 4% growth in 2014, according to the study.



But Parent said there is plenty of local quibbling among publishers with IAB Canada's annual growth figures. The 21% annual digital growth rate cited by IAB Canada was not consistent with many publisher revenue trends. "They always fail to realize that Facebook and Google are not just grabbing the lion's share, they're grabbing their [own] share as well," said Parent.

Search was the top format for digital ad spending in French Canada in 2015 (the last year IAB Canada reported by format), accounting for more than half of all digital spending (54.5%). While search is mature and relatively slow-growing, display and video ad spending posted annual growth rates of 46% and 48%, respectively, in 2015. Outlays for all other digital ad formats, including classified/directories, email and video games, fell sharply in 2015.

### Digital Ad Spending in Canada, by Format and Language, 2014 & 2015

millions of C\$ and % change

	French Canada			Total Canada		
	2014	2015	% change	2014	2015	% change
Search	C\$417	C\$433	4%	C\$2,052	C\$2,512	22%
Display	C\$188	C\$275	46%	C\$1,274	C\$1,554	22%
Video	C\$43	C\$64	48%	C\$266	C\$358	35%
Classifieds/directories	C\$26	C\$19	-26%	C\$171	C\$162	-5%
Email	C\$3	C\$2	-22%	C\$19	C\$13	-31%
Video gaming	C\$1	C\$0	-69%	C\$11	C\$5	-58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>C\$679</b>	<b>C\$794</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>C\$3,793</b>	<b>C\$4,604</b>	<b>21%</b>

Note: includes spending on mobile phones and tablets; excludes agency commissions; numbers may not add up to total due to rounding  
Source: Interactive Advertising Bureau of Canada (IAB Canada), "2015 Actual + 2016 Estimated Canadian Internet Advertising Revenue Survey" conducted by Ernst & Young; eMarketer calculations, Sep 12, 2016

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According to Kantar Millward Brown data from October 2016, French-speaking internet users in Canada favor traditional ads over digital ones. Cinema, TV, magazines, newspapers, out-of-home and radio ad formats were generally more preferred by a variety of age groups compared with digital formats. TV ads were viewed as "somewhat" or "very positive" by 54% of respondents ages 16 to 19, and by 48% of those ages 20 to 49. Similar favorability ratings were reported for the balance of traditional ad formats.

### Preferred Types of Traditional Ads According to French-Speaking Internet Users in Canada, by Age, Oct 2016

% of respondents in each group

	16-19	20-34	35-49
Cinema	71%	53%	45%
TV	54%	48%	48%
Magazines	51%	48%	51%
Newspapers	51%	50%	52%
Out-of-home	51%	48%	46%
Radio	38%	44%	44%

Note: responses of "somewhat" or "very positive"

Source: Kantar Millward Brown, "AdReaction: Engaging Gen X, Y and Z," Jan 10, 2017

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Digital ad formats were markedly less favored. Desktop display, online search, mobile display and desktop/mobile video pulled favorability numbers below one-third of respondents, generally.

### Preferred Types of Digital Ads According to French-Speaking Internet Users in Canada, by Age, Oct 2016

% of respondents in each group

	16-19	20-34	35-49
Desktop display	34%	28%	22%
Online search	33%	33%	22%
Mobile display	31%	24%	23%
Desktop video	30%	27%	23%
Mobile video	28%	24%	17%

Note: responses of "somewhat" or "very positive"

Source: Kantar Millward Brown, "AdReaction: Engaging Gen X, Y and Z," Jan 10, 2017

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Video ads—both desktop and mobile—scored low in the study's findings. While this may be due to an aversion to pre-roll ads, it may also relate to the fact that most advertisers haven't invested in quality video content in Quebec. That's mainly because ad inventory on French-language video is slim.

"There's not that much premium video content that's in French that markets to French Canada right now," said Pantazopoulos. "So if you're just looking to run an online video campaign, it's hard to find a place to run that."

There are very few non-news French video sites in Canada, making it hard to get scale in campaigns targeting by language. That puts a premium on targeting users by browser history instead of browser language, because most users split their time between French and English content. But the practice is lagging in Quebec.

## FOR BRANDS, IT'S ABOUT HITTING THE RIGHT CULTURAL NOTES

"From a digital marketing standpoint, this market is behind both English Canada and the US," said Lemieux. "First of all, the language. Although it's predominantly French, there's a distinction within Quebec between the Montreal metropolitan area, which is the biggest city, where half the population lives, and the rest of Quebec, which is predominantly French."

Another potential contributor to the spend gap is the uncertainty that Quebec's language laws create for national and international advertisers in digital formats. "Quebec is in many ways a different market from the rest of Canada, and that includes a different regulatory framework, with language and consumer protection laws that marketers ignore at their own risk," said Blais. "There's more than the legal risk involved in curbing the law. There's the risk to brand reputation, as these cases tend to get well publicized."

The laws dictate that regardless of user browser history, only French-language ads can be served on French content. (This makes local-language content harder to monetize, which may also contribute to a lack of French digital advertising.) On English content, ads in either language are permitted. Targeting by language is relatively simple, based on browser or mobile operating system language settings, and so observing these laws is also fairly simple, but it's become a perceived barrier for national brands.

For many advertisers, the safe bet is still TV because of its enduring share of audience in Quebec. "The payoff is still quite big on TV," said Robin Monniere, vice president of brand development and customer experience at Intact Insurance. "We are diversifying with digital, but when you are looking at it from every angle, if you want to build something in Quebec, you need to have TV in your portfolio."

**Quebec brand preferences are radically different from those in English Canada. According to the 2016 Gustavson Brand Trust Index, of the top 10 most trusted brands in all of Canada, only two made the top 10 for Quebec alone: Costco and Canon.**

Targeting Francophone Quebecers requires more than simply remessaging for language; it requires knowledge of cultural distinctions. The region's sensitivity about an authentic Quebec voice is hard to overestimate, and keeping in mind the preference for humor and local talent is also important.

"The most successful Quebec campaigns are built from the ground up," said Lemieux. "They're not translated. They're not voiced-over with Parisian French. They're not adapted. They're actually rescoped and built up because the market in French for Quebec is so different."

Authenticity in marketing campaigns, whether using TV to reach a mass audience or microtargeting in social media, can help solve a long-standing history of Anglophone brands falling flat in Quebec. Making the necessary investments and committing adequate local resources to build unique campaigns is acknowledged as best practice, but it's not the norm.

"Very few brands go that far," said Headspace's Blais. "To say that a lot of clients are coming our way saying, 'Hey, Quebec is a key market to us and we set aside some resources for this year, and we need to develop a plan for Quebec,' that's the exception way more than the rule."

SiriusXM Canada, a Headspace client, spends a disproportionate amount of its content marketing budget in Canada on the Quebec market, a result of the rich local music scene. Almost half of its total budget for the country goes to Quebec programs and festival sponsorships to align Quebec musicians with its service, even though SiriusXM offers just a few French channels.

Tapping into Quebec's star system has proven a uniquely effective measure in campaigns targeting the market. Ads using humorists like Martin Matte (for supermarket Maxi), Andre Sauve (for realtor RE/MAX) and Patrick Huard (who plays Rogatien, a taxi driver character, for Intact Insurance) have drawn positive reviews.

“One of the differentiators in tone in Quebec is that humor is very well-appreciated,” said Intact’s Monniere. “When we have the opportunity to use a well-known actor or someone that is from the star system of Quebec, it brings a whole new spectrum of affinity with the customer.” Whereas Intact’s “You Matter” national campaign focuses on customer stories, the campaign in Quebec instead uses local celebrities.

Most of the top TV shows in Quebec draw on homegrown talent. Billboards are filled with local celebrity testimonials, and social media influencers are exclusive to the province. “We work with a national brand that goes completely different in Quebec, aligning themselves along a local celebrity,” said Lemieux. “And they’ve seen results really skyrocket. We’ve seen brands like Honda and Toyota doing the same thing. Major brands taking a local Quebec-based spokesperson are having large success because of their language and the consumers actually associating with that local celebrity.”

## TARGETING STUDENTS AND OTHER MILLENNIALS

An additional demographic wrinkle is the large number of students in Quebec, especially in Montreal. “Students are a very important market in Montreal,” said Mark Lovell, president at the Lovell Group, a Montreal-based market researcher. “The city has among the highest rates of student population, similar to a city like Boston.”

With more than 150,000 full-time university students, the student culture in Montreal is strong and diverse. The Quacquarelli Symonds Best Student Cities list ranked Montreal as the top global city for students in February 2017. “Quebec is at least three markets for people under 30: Francophone, Anglophone and Allophone,” said Lovell. The last group, which speak neither French nor English as their native tongue, “is growing disproportionately and varies much.”

In targeting millennials, digital marketing has increasingly leveraged social channels that can seamlessly cross cultural and language borders. Montreal-based The Aldo Group, the international shoe brand and retailer, is shifting most of its millennial targeting to digital, including WhatsApp, although it’s a slower transition in Quebec. “We still see TV localization and brands using traditional mass media to connect with French Canadians, for sure,” said Grégoire Baret, Aldo’s general manager of omnichannel experience. “But I would say that like everywhere, digital and internet is becoming the way to go, especially for our business.”

Baret estimated that 70% of its consumers have researched online prior to entering an Aldo store, a rate that holds true for Quebec. That’s significantly higher than what was projected by Yellow Pages – Canada in a 2016 white paper on local retail in Canada. According to Yellow Pages – Canada, 49% of English-speaking people researched online consumer reviews on a product prior to purchasing it, compared with 23% for French-speaking people. Similarly, 13% of English speakers researched online consumer reviews on the store prior to purchasing a product compared with just 6% for French speakers.

Yellow Pages’ business listing service and mobile app, along with search marketing in general, are particularly effective in Quebec because the competition for keywords is less fierce, according to Thierry Bransi, director of marketing intelligence at Yellow Pages – Canada. “In the rest of Canada, if you’re looking for a barbecue, you might end up in the US or you might end up elsewhere compared to when you have a French product name, you will most likely end up with something in Quebec,” he said.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Quebec is undergoing a digital transformation.

Support from the provincial government to help the media and retail sectors as well as private sector innovation are aiming to accelerate a once-lagging digital culture. The creation of native digital services in Quebec has had some success combating the disruptive digital forces from abroad.

### Francophones in Canada spend less time with digital and more time with traditional media.

Factors that include language, native content and socioeconomics have combined to suppress digital usage and keep Quebecers tuned to their TVs. The transition to digital is happening, but at a slower rate than the rest of Canada.

**Digital advertising in French Canada is disproportionately low compared with the rest of Canada.** Higher annual growth rates in Quebec will help close that gap, riding the momentum of local digital services with richer advertising opportunities.

**Brand marketing in Quebec requires a commitment to building campaigns from the ground up.** Leveraging Quebec's local star system has worked for brands seeking an authentic tone in this distinct market.

## EMARKETER INTERVIEWS

### Aldo on Omnichannel Redesign: 'Sweat the Details'



**Grégoire Baret**

*General Manager, Omnichannel Experience*

**The Aldo Group**

*Interview conducted on March 31, 2017*

### Intact Insurance Won't Let Go of Linear TV Advertising in Quebec Just Yet



**Robin Monniere**

*Vice President, Brand Development and Customer Experience*

**Intact Insurance**

*Interview conducted on April 4, 2017*



**Rudy Abitbol**

*Vice President, Marketing and Growth, North America*

**altima**

*Interview conducted on April 5, 2017*



**Éric Blais**

*President*

**Headspace Marketing**

*Interview conducted on March 28, 2017*



**Thierry Bransi**

*Director, Marketing Intelligence*

**Yellow Pages – Canada**

*Interview conducted on April 13, 2017*



**Thierry Gauthier**

*Vice President, Client Services*

**McCann Montreal**

*Interview conducted on April 11, 2017*



**Arnaud Granata**

*President and Publisher*

**Infopresse Publishing**

*Interview conducted on April 6, 2017*



**Mario Lemieux**

*President and Partner*

**DAC Group Canada**

*Interview conducted on March 22, 2017*



**Mark Lovell**

*President*

**Lovell Group**

*Interview conducted on April 4, 2017*



**Hector Pantazopoulos**

*Chief Revenue Officer*

**SourceKnowledge**

*Interview conducted on April 7, 2017*



**Samuel Parent**

*President*

**Titan Interactive**

*Interview conducted on March 27, 2017*



**Marc Tanguay**

*Quebec Sales Manager*

**Crucial Interactive**

*Interview conducted on March 21, 2017*

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