

BUSINESS GUIDE: SETTING UP IN THE UK

GETTING A GRIP OF BRITISH BUSINESS CULTURE AND MEDIA

- ✓ Why cultures matter
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Leadership and decision making
- ✓ Before introducing Your Company To UK Media
- ✓ When Speaking To British Journalists

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DELIBERATE PR



GETTING A GRIP OF BRITISH BUSINESS CULTURE AND MEDIA

The British general public and the UK Media – has become obsessed with Sweden and wider Nordic cultural concepts and social ideas. This preoccupation first became codified during the financial crisis at the end of the first decade of the century, when the British looked outside of their own country to a European region perceived to have a more defined and successful society and economy. The interest in Sweden continues to this day, with every emerging personality or innovation - reinforcing the power and opportunity of Brand Sweden.

Although Swedes are generally very well liked in the UK, maybe because Brits and Swedes have a lot in common – such as a similar sense of humour and expression of body language, as well as being quite calm and laidback, we may assume we are more alike than we actually are. There are however some differences that are important to be aware of, learn about and prepare for, both when it comes to the business culture and the media landscape.

This business guide leads you through the similarities and differences between Swedish and British business culture, as well as the pitfalls and how to avoid them.

WHY CULTURES MATTER



COMMUNICATION



LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING



BEFORE INTRODUCING YOUR COMPANY TO UK MEDIA



WHEN SPEAKING TO BRITISH JOURNALISTS

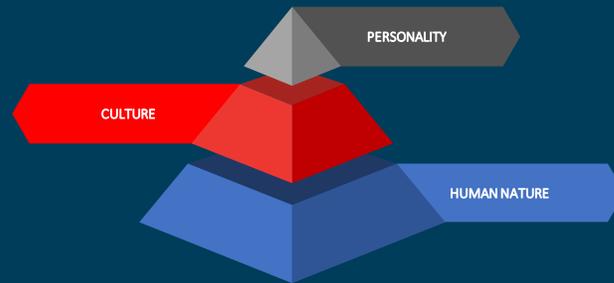




WHY CULTURES MATTER SO MUCH

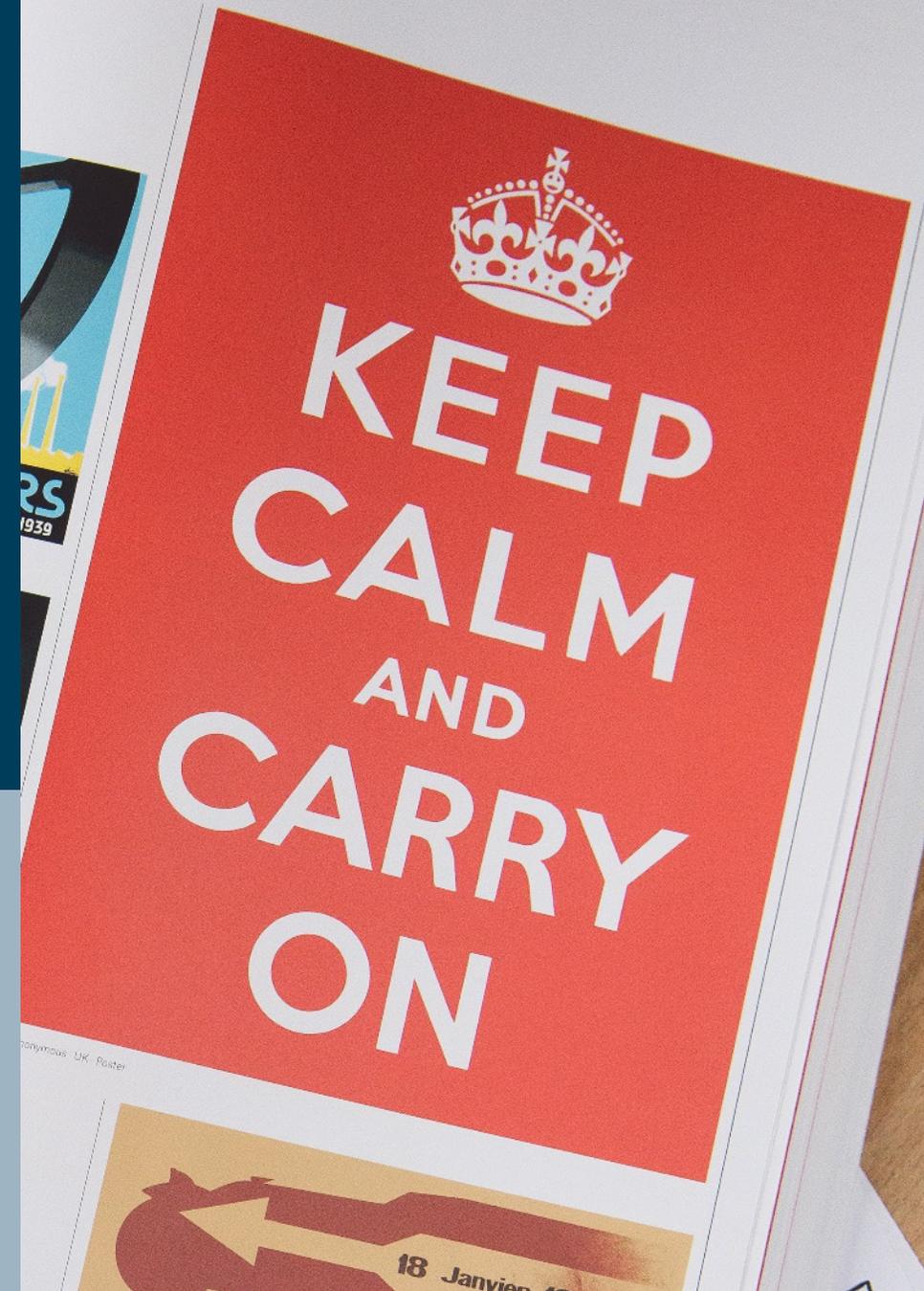
When it comes to intercultural business and interaction, we are all to some degree biased, biased by our own cultural perspective and habits. It's like we have our own glasses through which we see the world. And yet, when it comes to any international interaction, understanding and being able to adapt to other cultures can make the difference between success and failure.

In some ways people are all the same (human nature) and at the same time everyone is unique (personality). And in between there is culture, where we share values, beliefs and habits with a group of people. There are many types of cultures; national, ethnical, generational and corporate cultures, among others.



DON'T OVERLOOK THE DIFFERENCES

Swedes are generally very well liked in the UK. And this may be because Brits and Swedes have a lot in common – such as a similar sense of humour and expression of body language, as well as being quite calm and laidback. This means we may assume we are more alike than we actually are. There are however some differences that are important to be aware of, learn about and prepare for. Here are *some* examples of different cultural patterns and habits that could create friction and misunderstanding, unless understood.





COMMUNICATION

Swedes are often seen as more direct in their communication than Brits are. In the UK there is greater emphasis on politeness, small talk and not just going straight for the message in question. A Brit will typically not want to criticise or disagree with an idea or proposal openly, but may instead reply in a vague, oblique, non-committing way.

Instructions are usually given as suggestions (“you *may* want to think about...”) rather than a straight “do this”. And the word “please” is very important. Never ask for something, without adding the word please. It’s expected, it’s polite.

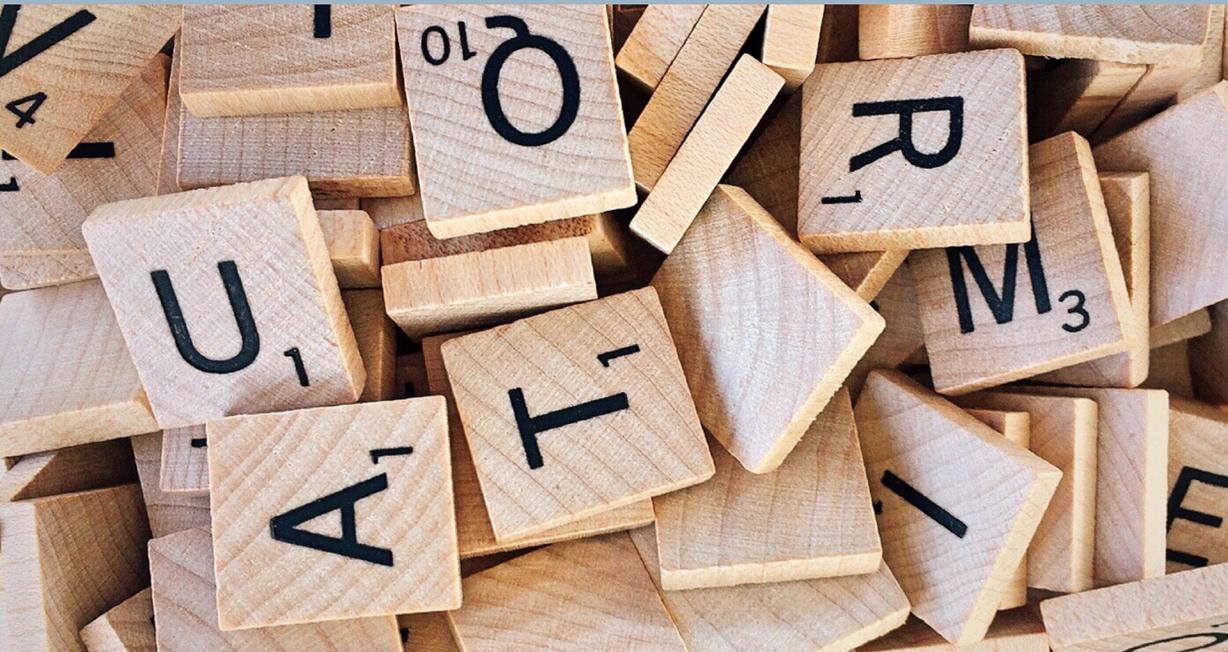


AT WORK AND SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Punctuality is a little less important than in Sweden. Being a few minutes late to a meeting is more acceptable in the UK, and in a social setting, being on time is much less important (unless if it’s for a sit-down dinner at someone’s house).

Socialising often happens in pubs, restaurants and cafes. You will typically not be invited to someone’s home until you’ve known them for quite a while.

‘Dress code’ is something most Swedes are just used to seeing on party invites, but in the UK dress code also plays a role at work, where companies can have specific office dress codes and offsite meetings often will include instructions on what attire is appropriate/expected. Dress code is also industry and location dependent, with more formal dress codes in for example the legal and banking worlds, and in London.





LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

At first glance, leadership looks quite similar between the two countries, but on closer reflection the UK leadership style is more distant; there is greater power distance between a UK leader and their team than in Sweden where leaders tend to be part of the team. This means that communication is expected to follow the hierarchy lines and it's not the norm for an employee to go talk directly with the most senior leader for example. Instead, larger companies can have so called "skip level" meetings where employees can sit down and talk to more senior leaders in an organised way.

There is also an expectation that leaders have the overall responsibility when it comes to decision making, as opposed to the group, even if the group often are invited to give input. Team consensus decisions making like in Sweden is rare.

PLAN FOR IT

Practice Cultural Intelligence by planning for the cultural approach. Strategise. Don't leave it to chance. Make sure you create the right impact in the British environment (and beyond). The world is increasingly interconnected and culturally aware, but the reality is still that most of us tend to operate from an automatic, cultural perspective with our cultural 'glasses' on, so taking some time to reflect on cultural differences is a wise move.



SOME QUICK CULTURE TIPS TO PREPARE FOR DOING BUSINESS IN THE UK

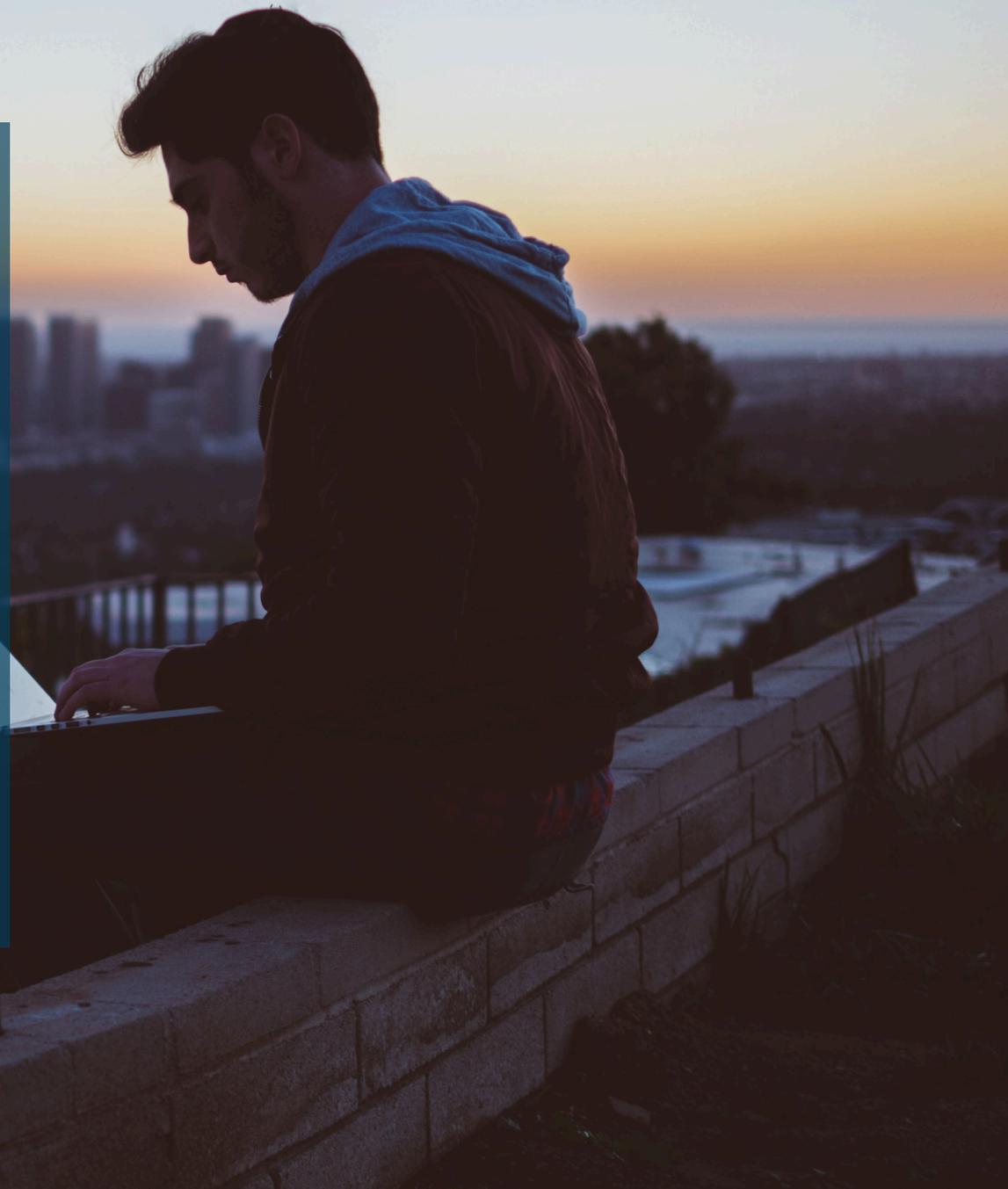
- ✓ Develop your cultural intelligence by learning more about the values and habits (of which we've shared a few above) in the UK (and/or local and regional areas).
- ✓ Take your cultural glasses off and see things from their perspective, while still being authentic. Be authentically flexible by showing that you effectively collaborate across cultural boundaries.
- ✓ Be curious and ask questions (not too directly) to learn more about the culture and the people you meet.
- ✓ Include Brits in your business conversations to ensure you get a UK perspective.
- ✓ Make UK friends to learn more about the culture outside of work too.



STARTUPS: SWEDEN → UK → THE WORLD

The UK media – and by extension, the British general public – has become obsessed with Sweden and wider Nordic cultural concepts and social ideas. This preoccupation first became codified during the financial crisis at the end of the first decade of the century, when the British looked outside of their own country to a European region perceived to have a more defined and successful society and economy. The interest in Sweden continues to this day, with every emerging personality or innovation – from Skarsgård to Spotify, Greta to Klarna – reinforcing the power and opportunity of Brand Sweden.

Swedish startups, rather than going straight to the USA (a market with limited awareness of Nordic virtues), should be introduced to the English-speaking world (and global investment and business community) by first expanding to the UK. Having established itself in a British media and consumer landscape interested in the next big thing from Sweden, a startup is then well-placed to expand to other English-language markets.





BEFORE INTRODUCING YOUR COMPANY TO UK MEDIA

- ✓ **Identify and prepare details of the problem that your company solves...** Often the first news story for a new company revolves around the scale of the problem that it solves. Sometimes, these are problems that are previously unacknowledged (no one knew that it needed fixing or, indeed, could be fixed), so be prepared to illustrate the scale of the broken thing that your company fixes.

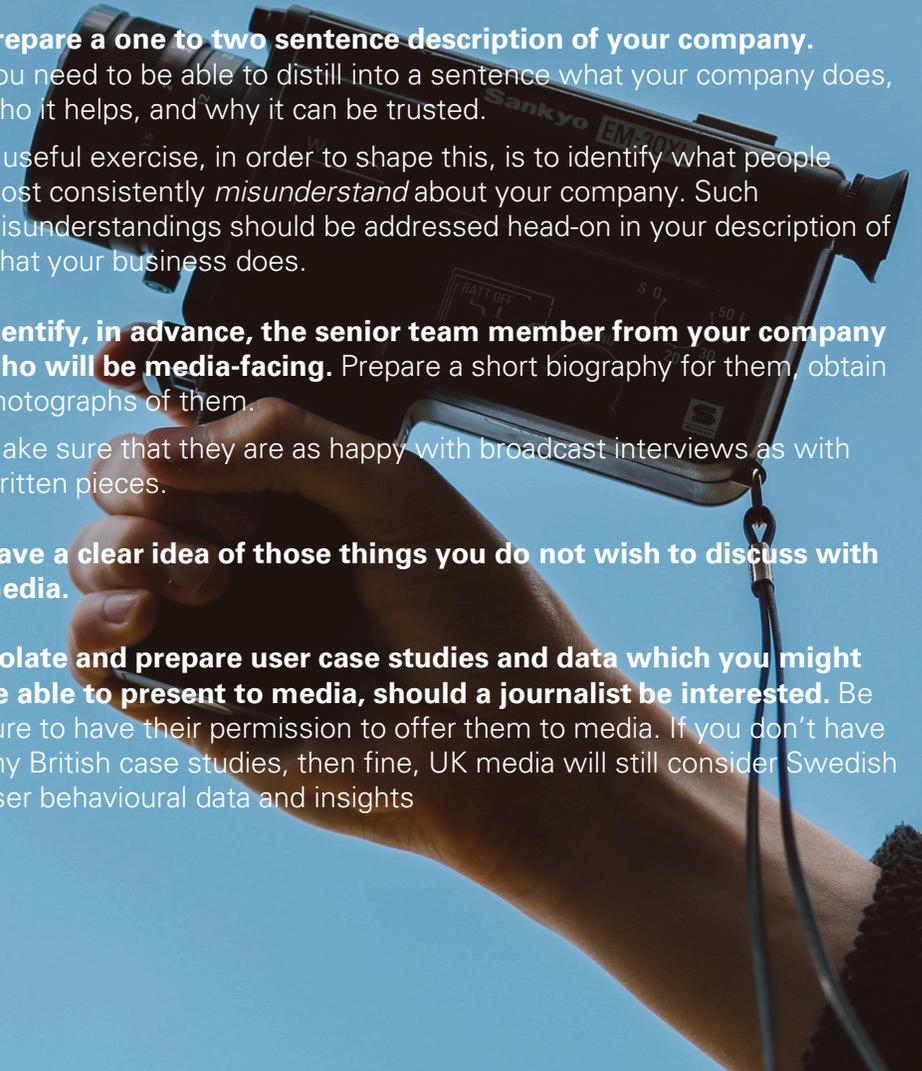
This justifies the role of your business, and also serves to increase understanding as to what your business does.
- ✓ **Identify how your startup might be linked to a positive virtue that the British media already associates with Sweden e.g. environmental activism, advanced healthcare system, cutting-edge design, gender equality etc.**
- ✓ **Can your startup be suggested as being similar to (or might follow a similar growth trajectory to) a previous Swedish success story?** Do you have team members or investors who are connected to previous Swedish business success stories?
- ✓ **Prepare a relatable 'creation story' for your company.** Whilst most businesses are founded primarily to make money, this isn't a particularly engaging story for media!

Instead, try to give an understandable account of your company history, your eureka moment, and involve the personal experiences of senior team members. Also, be able to explain your company name!

- ✓ **Prepare a one to two sentence description of your company.** You need to be able to distill into a sentence what your company does, who it helps, and why it can be trusted.

A useful exercise, in order to shape this, is to identify what people most consistently *misunderstand* about your company. Such misunderstandings should be addressed head-on in your description of what your business does.
- ✓ **Identify, in advance, the senior team member from your company who will be media-facing.** Prepare a short biography for them, obtain photographs of them.

Make sure that they are as happy with broadcast interviews as with written pieces.
- ✓ **Have a clear idea of those things you do not wish to discuss with media.**
- ✓ **Isolate and prepare user case studies and data which you might be able to present to media, should a journalist be interested.** Be sure to have their permission to offer them to media. If you don't have any British case studies, then fine, UK media will still consider Swedish user behavioural data and insights





WHEN SPEAKING TO BRITISH JOURNALISTS

- ✓ It's best to leave the jantelagen in Sweden, as you are in a market where underqualified or undeserving companies will have no hesitation in over-emphasising their qualities. Don't hold back!
- ✓ Try to avoid email, better to phone.
- ✓ Have a knowledge of their previous articles (and refer to them).
- ✓ Be newsworthy – Whereas some journalists are simply interested in interesting companies, for most, the compelling reason for writing about a company is that it links to a live news event, a future news event, or an anniversary. Be able to explain how your company links to something that is happening (or is about to happen).
- ✓ Explain who can give comment or be interviewed, and what qualifies them to do this.
- ✓ If you get to a point where a British journalist interviews you (or someone from within your company), you must NEVER EVER ask to proof an article (or quotes within an article) prior to publication. This will offend them.
- ✓ If your headquarters are in Sweden, invite journalists to visit you there.





ABOUT THE SWEDISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR THE UK

The Swedish Chamber of Commerce for the United Kingdom – a not for profit organisation – is the ultimate platform for entrepreneurs and businesses within the Swedish-British business community. Founded in 1906 – by business and for business – we have represented, inspired and promoted our members, extended commercial relations between our countries, and delivered first-class services and events for over a century.

We serve a broad and diverse network of businesses – from entrepreneurs and start-ups to large corporates, and passionately aspire to provide the most relevant and valuable services. We support businesses throughout their life cycle, whether they are expanding into the UK, developing their business or wanting to connect more widely within the community.

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ABOUT THINK SOLUTIONS UK LTD

Since 2001, Think Solutions (based in the UK and in Sweden), together with sister company Katapult Partners have supported leaders, teams and organisations around the world to navigate and succeed in a fast-changing world.

Think specialises in Leadership and business culture as drivers for transformation, collaboration, inclusion, innovation and sustainable results. They deliver strategic and tactical consultancy, design and delivery of solutions including workshops and learning programmes, team effectiveness events, executive coaching and transformation programmes.

Clients across 25+ countries include American Express, Trygg-Hansa, ABN AMRO, IKEA, HSBC, SOS Children’s Villages, H&M, Skanska and Greenpeace among others.

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DELIBERATE PR

ABOUT DELIBERATE PR

Deliberate helps make clever Nordic, US, and European startups and concepts make the news: showcasing to potential investors, strategic partners, employees, and users just what makes these companies unique and scalable.

We know that 99% of traditional PR is pointless. Instead, we focus on delivering what startups actually need, deserve, and can leverage as part of their journey from early-stage and seed-funded to unicorn status. Therefore, you won’t find us staging silly stunts, lame photo opportunities, banal opinion polls and surveys, nor ever insulting the intelligence of journalists.

With a 25-strong team operating between the UK and US and securing high-impact exposure within international business, technology, and consumer media titles, Deliberate offers centralized news and media support for B2C and B2B startups with interesting stories to tell.

Our news-infused approach allows Scandinavian, German and other European startups to turn the UK into a gateway to the wider English-speaking world, and then launch in the US. We also provide support to leading US startups domestically, as well as help them cross the Atlantic.

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