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BLOGPOST Media Landscape Sweden: From Dusk till Dawn

When we think of Sweden, we usually associate it with Astrid Lindgren, IKEA and elks. However, the Swedish backdrop isn't the only thing that is fascinating, its media landscape has interesting aspects to offer as well. So, what moves the Swedish media landscape? What are the similarities and differences to our media system and does the Swedish media have to deal with the same problems? We spoke to Åsa Yngve, Business Developer at the [Swedish news agency TT](#) about these questions.

news aktuell: Could you give us a sense of the media landscape in Sweden?

Åsa Yngve: The Swedish media market consists of a few, fairly large media groups. Some privately held, some publicly traded. Over the past few years the number of companies has been decreasing as the smaller players have been acquired by the larger ones. This trend has accelerated lately as the local ad market revenue has plummeted, due to the fierce competition from companies such as Google and Facebook. The collapsing local ad market has resulted in the majority of the media groups seriously struggling and shifting their focus towards reader revenue. One notable consequence of this is that all major newspapers now have some version of a paywall. Some use a metered paywall, some use a hard paywall, others a combination.

As far as broadcasting is concerned, there are really only two tv broadcasting companies with a news focus, one of them being publicly funded, through a tax. As for radio, there's really only the public service company that provides a serious news service. Unlike many other countries, Sweden doesn't really have independent local tv and radio stations that provide a news service.

news aktuell: What are the challenges and opportunities - especially concerning the print crisis?

Åsa Yngve: The major challenge, as mentioned above, is the declining ad market, as the majority of ad revenue, in particular new revenue, goes to Google, Facebook, etc. In addition, the further reliance on different types of reader revenue, mainly subscription revenue, has led to a shift within many media companies. Here the different types of traffic data and their analyzation take front and center. This has also brought on a focus on local and hyper local news, as well as an urge to identify what makes each media outlet unique, thus placing further importance on giving readers a) what they want and b) what they can't access someplace else.

All this poses challenges to the news agency business model. As a news agency our business model has historically been economies of scale. As many of our clients are now larger than us, with more journalists and developers on their payroll than we have, they're now able to achieve their own economies of scale. Also, the demand for differentiated content is also something not offered by the news agency in the past. Differentiated content, as mentioned, is also perceived as being more important in a digital environment, where the reader can easily access a range of digital news outlets, instead of "only" having access to the print paper in your local area.

Our future challenge is mainly with the increasing digital business of our clients, as they currently still very much need us for print. However, many of our clients treat print as a sunseting business, not an area where they innovate. In the short-term this is an opportunity for us as a news agency, but obviously it's not sustainable in the long run.

The news agency has always been a 24/7, real-time operation, which is still much appreciated among clients. We're also still considered to be a very trustworthy news source, which clients deem important in today's fast-changing media climate, where the breaking news cycle moves faster by the day (it sometimes seems).

news aktuell: Sweden has traditionally had a strongly increased subsidy system for the press - supporting not only public but also private media. How does it work? And how does it affect the media landscape in Sweden?

Åsa Yngve: As of 2019 the Swedish media subsidy system was changed, and it now includes additional funding targeted to innovation and local journalism. This is an addition to the already existing system where subscribed newspapers, with a print edition, can apply for funds based on circulation and market penetration. This previously meant, in reality, that the newspaper that wasn't the market leader in a particular area was eligible to apply. However, with the steep decline in circulation and market penetration of recent years, you might now be the so-called market leader in your area and still qualify for this subsidy. The public service license fee, which finances the public tv and radio, was abolished and replaced with a tax in 2019.

The total amount in the press subsidy system is 570 million SEK (53 million Euro) and will likely be increased with another 100 million SEK (93 million Euro) for 2020. In comparison, the public service companies get just over 8.5 billion SEK (7.9 billion Euro) per year, over a six-year period. In addition, the public service funding is increased with 2 per cent each year.

news aktuell: In Sweden many people are willing to pay for content - even online content. Which new paths are Swedish publishing houses taking to catch up with falling revenues?

Åsa Yngve: As already mentioned, one way of dealing with falling revenues is merging with and/or buying other media companies, trying to find synergies and sharing admin costs. Another way, as also mentioned, is making the shift from ad revenue to reader revenue. This has meant that concepts like conversions and churn are much more established, and relevant, these days as opposed to reach and print circulation. Reach is still important, but just somewhat less in comparison to just a decade ago.

Instead of the video "buzz" from a few years ago, many media companies incorporate video within text articles.

Several media groups are experimenting with a "shared paywall", where you get access to a number of Swedish papers through just one subscription, regardless of their owner.

Some Swedish magazines are very successful with events and travel content, so newspapers are also joining this field, with guided trips and seminars for subscribers.

news aktuell: How has the rise of social media changed media landscape in Sweden?

Åsa Yngve: Internet in itself has fundamentally changed the way the public receive their news, as it is now easier to only receive the stories you are interested in. You no longer have to wait for the evening news broadcast on tv or have a newspaper subscription. The rise of social media has further intensified this, as everyone now has access to a newsfeed 24/7, but this newsfeed is no longer necessarily curated by journalists, but by algorithms tailored to special interest groups, advertisers, etc. This has had a profound effect on how journalists and news are perceived, obviously not only in Sweden, but all over the world.

Newsrooms have to relate to social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, etc - social media is an important source for content, and this content is sometimes news and sometimes entertainment.

news aktuell: Which social media channels are primarily used in Sweden?

Åsa Yngve: Sweden is quite similar to other countries: Facebook is still number one, although engagement is decreasing, and the users are getting older. Instagram is number two with Snapchat at number three. Snapchat, notably, is still mainly being used by people under 35. Twitter is still very visible in the news, with many politicians and journalists using the service, however, usage is decreasing.

news aktuell: Could you specify the dos and don'ts for PR-Profs when communicating to Swedish journalists?

Åsa Yngve: Like everywhere else, journalists in Sweden are stressed. Be short, straight forward with the most important thing first. Think like a journalist! What's my angle and lead?

Don't interrupt the wrong person. Instead of approaching one single journalist or news editor, aim wider; that's a better way of reaching the right one.

Look outside your own window, is something breaking going on right now? Maybe your pitch fits right into that story, or maybe it works better another day when things are calmer. Newsrooms are slimmed and can only work with a finite number of stories simultaneously.

This interview was originally posted in our blog:

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