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“SWEDEN” – a trademark suffering from the corona-effect

Petter Rindforth, Managing Partner at Fenix Legal, examines the use of “SWEDEN” as a trademark and how its reputation is changing in the face of COVID-19.

There are many globally well-known trademarks that originate from Sweden, including IKEA, H&M, ABBA, and Volvo. It is interesting to see that the word SWEDEN is also a rather popular inclusion as a significant part of a trademark.

A trademark search conducted on September 2, 2020 at the WIPO IP Portal, gave 2,105 hits on trademarks based on “SWEDEN”, whereof 1,372 are active/valid trademark registrations.

Many of those trademarks are owned by the Swedish spirits company Absolut Company AB, such as ABSOLUT COUNTRY OF SWEDEN, and COUNTRY OF SWEDEN (USPTO No 73828535), for vodka in class 33.

Other examples are:-

- Oriflame Cosmetics AB, owner of ORIFLAME BEAUTY OF SWEDEN (class 3).
- Tiger of Sweden AB, with the trademark TIGER OF SWEDEN (for clothes and bags).
- Volvo Car Corporation, owner of the EUTM 007417835 FROM SWEDEN WITH LOVE.

But it is not only Swedish companies that want to indicate or refer to Sweden as a way to market their goods and services. A Ms Hillevi Saperstein in the US has registered “BORN IN SWEDEN / RAISED IN CALIFORNIA” as a trademark for class 25 goods (USPTO Reg No 1053892). South Korea has four local owners who registered “X DAYTRIP Inspired by Sweden” as a trademark for class 25 goods, and the Spanish company Auto Sweden S.A. has a local Spanish trademark registration (M1937743) “AUTO SWEDEN” for services in class 37.

SWEDEN, registered or not, is an important trademark as such for Swedish industry.

The Swedish Trade and Invest Council is a company owned by the Swedish state, which has a subsidiary name of ‘Business Sweden’ that is jointly owned by the Swedish state and the Swedish business sector with a mandate and a mission to help international companies



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gain access to the Swedish market and help domestic ones utilize it as a platform for expansion. Their clients range from start-ups via small and medium sized businesses to multinational enterprises – with tailor-made services catering to all of these segments. And of course, they use SWEDEN as a trademark for their services, the council being the owner of the International trademark registration IR1173383 BUSINESS SWEDEN for services in classes 35, 36, 41 and 45.

Business Sweden operates in more than 40 markets, from Helsinki to Hong Kong and from Moscow to Mexico City, with the headquarters located in Stockholm (Sweden) and Shanghai. It all sounds good, but checking their web site at <https://www.business-sweden.com> shows that the latest press release was published December 12, 2018..

A more active government agency in Sweden is the Swedish Institute (SI), responsible for cultural exchange and sharing information about Sweden beyond its borders. This means that SI aim to contribute to 1) greater influence for Sweden and Swedish interests, 2) increased prosperity and stability in Sweden’s vicinity, and 3) democratic, equitable and sustainable development in developing countries.

SI regularly carries out surveys to find out how Sweden is viewed abroad, including study of foreign media covering 12 different languages.

The February 2019 report showed that the image of Sweden among the foreign general public was still overwhelmingly positive. According to the SI analyst Mr Jacob Stenberg, the themes most associated with Sweden by survey respondents was the Swedish welfare state, a modern and well-functioning land, the nature and environment, and sustainability.

Then came coronavirus

Kantar, a data and evidence-based agency



emka74 / Shutterstock.com

in London providing insights and actionable recommendations to their clients, published in March 2020 their COVID-19 Barometer, a leading syndicated study on how COVID-19 is influencing consumer behavior, attitudes and expectations, covering 45,000 interviews in over 50 markets around the world, including Sweden.

The result of the study shows that:

- 77% expect trademarks to be helpful during the corona pandemic, and that the trademark owners/companies shall inform their customers about their efforts to deal with the situation.
- 75% is of the opinion that it is wrong to use the crisis to promote your own trademark in order to sell more.
- 70% wanted to see a more “calm tone outward”.
- 40% stated that trademarks should avoid humor in advertising.

However, only 8% was of the opinion that trademark owners should totally stop advertising.

So, what does this mean for the trademark SWEDEN?

The global market research company Ipsos published, on August 25, 2020, their Nation Brands Index (NBI). The survey was conducted during July and August 2020 with 20,000 respondents, focused on the strength of 50 nations “brands” in relation to how they deal with health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results show that:

- The nation’s handling of health crises impacts on the comfort ability of travelers

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to travel to that country over the next five years.

- Sweden ranks number 15 of total 50 countries regarding health crises management and ranks 10 of 50 regarding how comfortable travelers are with travelling to Sweden.
- 40% of the respondents have a positive view of Sweden’s management of health crises, 43% percent are neutral, and 17% have a negative view travelling to Sweden.
- 47% of Swedish respondents have a positive view of Sweden’s management of health crises.

The positive respondents regarding the nation’s management of health crises are also the respondents most comfortable with traveling to that country. Respondents in China, India and Egypt are the most comfortable

Résumé

Petter Rindforth, Managing Partner

Petter Rindforth has a Master of law from the University of Stockholm, Sweden. He is Managing Partner at Fenix Legal. Petter is a European Trademark and Design Attorney, an expert in cyberlaw, arbitrator/panellist for WIPO, Forum, IIS, Czech Arbitration Court, and at the Swedish National Courts Administration list of Mediators, focused on intellectual property. He is representing FICPI in the Intellectual Property Constituency at ICANN and member of the Europe Global Advisory Council (Europe GAC) of The International Trademark Association (INTA).



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travelling to Sweden (63% of Chinese and Indian respondents and 57% of Egyptian respondents), these respondents are also positive about Sweden's management of health crises. Comparing to Europe, where, for example, less than 30% of respondents in Germany and in France are comfortable travelling to Sweden.

The Swedish Institute is well aware of the corona-effect. In a report published on April 22, 2020, Ms Madeleine Sjöstedt, director general of the Swedish Institute, noted that "there is an incredible amount more reporting about Sweden than usual. It is above all in the big media houses that have a strong impact that Sweden is seen in a different way than before".

Usually, foreign media reports Sweden in a neutral way, but during corona many articles are negatively charged and critical. It is about why Sweden differs, images of how "everything is as usual in Sweden", and theories about what risks happening due to the Swedish strategy. The words "experiment" and "open" are often used but with negative connotations.

"Above all, our neighbors in the Nordic region have a critical or hesitant attitude to the Swedish strategy," said Madeleine Sjöstedt. In the long run, this can lead to negative effects, especially when it comes to relations with our neighboring countries, she says.

Historically, the image of Sweden often tips over into both horror examples and utopia - a

social experiment with totally liberated inhabitants who harbor a blind trust in the state, or a social democratic dream society.

Madeleine Sjöstedt says that it is not unusual for the image of Sweden to be used to score points or illustrate different ways. Therefore, she believes that it is important to show a picture of how things really are in Sweden, something that the Swedish Institute is working on.

The Swedish Institute is thereby - together with Business Sweden - acting as the combined "trademark and market department" of Sweden, with the same problems as other trademark owners/companies, trying to keep the goodwill, satisfy present customers, and market their goods and services to new possible customers all over the world. The vision of the Swedish institute is a world in which individuals and nation-states join together in seeking solutions to the global challenges of the future.

And the fact is: Sweden is basically the same as prior to corona. If you trust the trademark SWEDEN, continue to enjoy the related goods and services!

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