Nordic Software Summit

Nordic Software Summit
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AI analysis

Nordic Software Summit 2025: Event report

Wednesday 20 August, 2025

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Table of contents

Summary

The Nordic Software Summit 2025 brought together industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and experts to discuss various facets of scaling software businesses globally, with a particular focus on the unique strengths and challenges faced by Nordic companies. A recurring theme throughout the summit was the exceptional entrepreneurial spirit inherent in the Nordic region, which drives innovation and necessitates a global outlook from the outset due to the small domestic markets. This spirit, combined with high digital adoption rates, engineering talent, and access to funding, positions Nordic companies favourably in the global software industry. However, the summit also highlighted the importance of overcoming cultural barriers like humility and caution, which can impede bold international expansion.

Another key theme was the critical role of leadership in scaling businesses across borders. The evolution of leadership roles and mindsets was emphasised, focusing on the need for leaders to shift their identity from functional roles to leadership roles. Emotional intelligence, accountability, vision, and purpose were identified as essential components of effective leadership. The rise of AI was seen as a driver for leaders to become more people-oriented, as technical skills would increasingly be handled by AI. This shift underscores the importance of empathy, compassion, and the ability to inspire and coach team members in an AI-driven future.

The summit also delved into practical strategies for international business scaling. Sessions covered the importance of having a clear and shared sales process, leveraging Employer of Record (EOR) services to facilitate global expansion, and the significance of direct customer contact. The necessity of robust advisory boards and influential relationships was discussed, highlighting the need for companies to build long-term relationships with buyers and secure interest from potential partners before initiating processes. These strategies are crucial for navigating macro uncertainties and market sentiment, ensuring successful outcomes in capital raises and M&A activities.

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AI's transformative potential was a significant focus, with discussions on how AI agents are becoming commonplace and the decreasing cost of software development. AI agents, described as digital colleagues performing tasks autonomously, were seen as essential in enhancing productivity and ensuring more efficient workflows. SaaS companies were advised to adapt to this new paradigm by creating agent-friendly platforms that facilitate the seamless integration and utilisation of AI agents. The declining cost of software development was seen as enabling companies to create tailored products rapidly, often bypassing the need for off-the-shelf solutions.

The summit underscored the importance of cultural leadership and understanding local market dynamics in international expansion. Aligning product roadmaps with company strategies, localising marketing efforts, and adapting sales strategies to local market dynamics were identified as critical factors for success. The necessity of overcoming cultural and legal differences was emphasised, with advice to prepare teams for these challenges before sending them abroad. This approach ensures a cohesive team culture and effective onboarding, fostering a sense of belonging among remote teams.

In conclusion, the Nordic Software Summit 2025 highlighted the importance of confidence and boldness for Nordic software companies aiming to scale globally. The integration of AI and human-centric leadership emerged as a key theme, reflecting the balance between leveraging technological advancements and maintaining a focus on people-oriented leadership. The summit provided valuable insights into the complexities of international expansion, practical strategies for scaling businesses, and the transformative potential of AI, encouraging attendees to embrace their strengths and take decisive steps towards global growth.
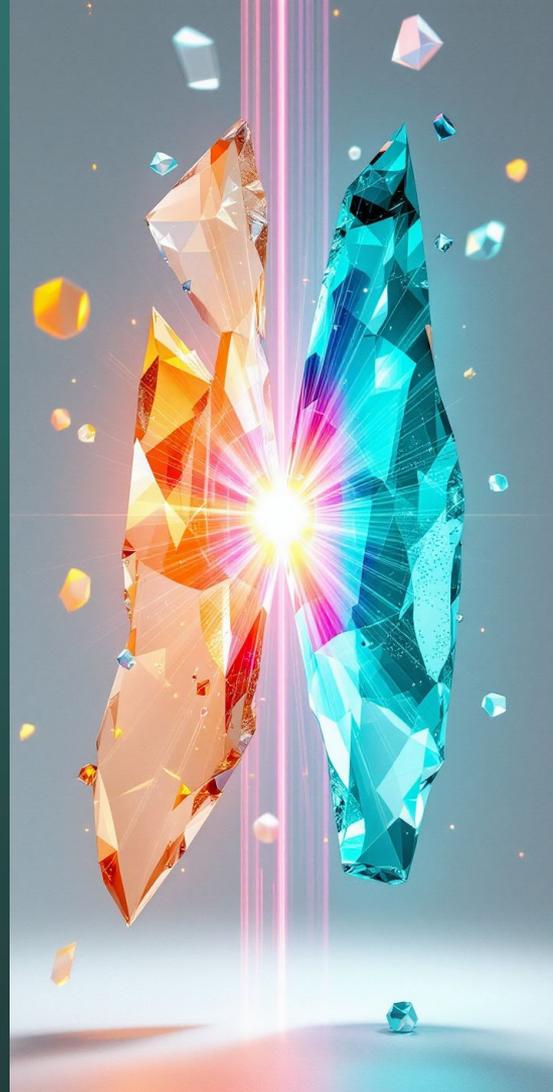
Key takeaways

Entrepreneurial spirit

The exceptional entrepreneurial spirit of Nordic countries drives innovation and necessitates a global outlook from the outset, positioning them favourably in the global software industry.

Leadership evolution

Effective leadership requires a shift from functional roles to leadership roles, with emotional intelligence, accountability, vision, and purpose being essential components.

AI integration

AI agents are becoming commonplace, enhancing productivity and ensuring more efficient workflows, necessitating SaaS companies to create agent-friendly platforms.

Cultural leadership

Understanding local market dynamics, localising marketing efforts, and adapting sales strategies to local market dynamics are critical for successful international expansion.

Confidence in scaling

Nordic software companies must embrace their capabilities and take confident steps towards international expansion, leveraging their strengths and overcoming cultural barriers.

Topics

Artificial intelligence is recognised as a transformative force, reshaping industries by automating tasks, enhancing efficiency, and boosting creativity. However, it also brings significant ethical, societal, and geopolitical challenges, such as dependency, bias, job displacement, and increased surveillance. The discussions underscore the need for careful management to mitigate risks and harness opportunities, ensuring AI contributes positively to society through ethical governance, privacy, and accountability.

Agents are pivotal in improving user experience and fostering innovation within companies. They act as digital colleagues, augmenting tasks by providing analysis, suggestions, and proactive assistance. Their seamless integration into systems via agent-friendly platforms and standards enables robust performance and substantial advancements in productivity, cost savings, and customer service.

Meanwhile, software is highlighted as an essential driver of innovation, efficiency, and international growth, with significant emphasis on ethical considerations, AI integration, and operational efficiency to create sustainable futures and expand market reach.
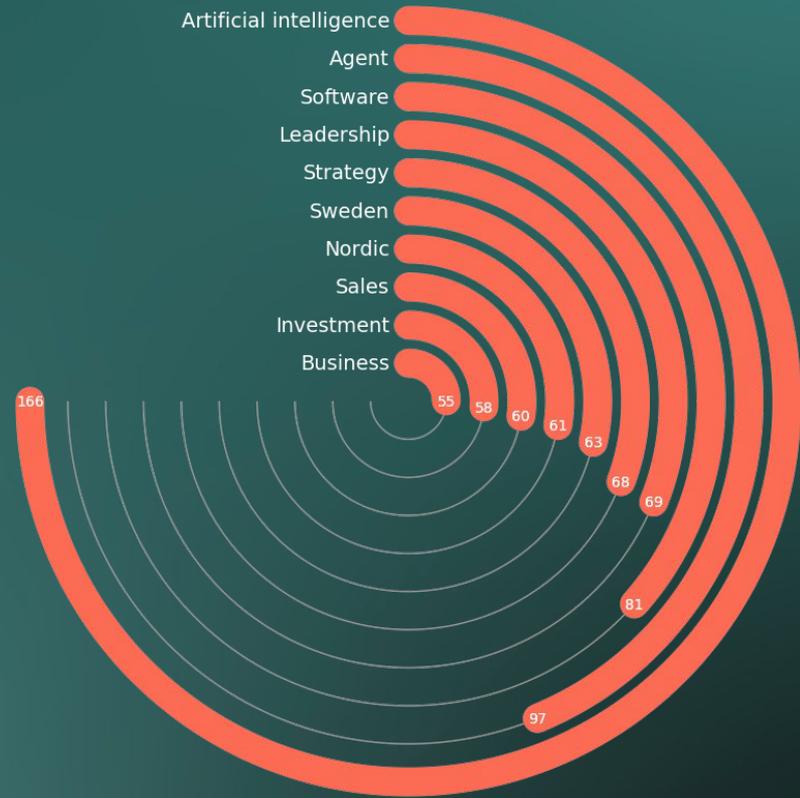
Top 3 topics unpacked: What was said about ...?

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is seen as a transformative force across various sectors, enhancing efficiency, creativity, and productivity while also posing significant ethical, societal, and geopolitical challenges. Discussions highlight AI's potential in automating tasks, reshaping industries, and providing substantial competitive advantages, but also express concerns about dependency, bias, job displacement, and increased surveillance.

The societal implications of AI are profound, with debates revolving around ethical governance, privacy, accountability, and the balance between technological benefits and human values. The rapid advancement of AI necessitates careful management to mitigate risks and harness opportunities, ensuring it contributes positively to society.

Agent

Agents are viewed as pivotal tools in enhancing efficiency, improving user experience, and fostering innovation within companies. They are seen as digital colleagues that work alongside humans, augmenting tasks rather than replacing them, by providing analysis, suggestions, and proactive assistance. Their integration into systems requires agent-friendly platforms and standards like the Model Context Protocol (MCP), ensuring seamless interaction and robust performance.

For society at large, agents promise substantial advancements in productivity, cost savings, and customer service. They offer the potential to streamline operations, foster creativity, and maintain up-to-date information autonomously. By experimenting and refining agents, businesses can unlock new possibilities, making them indispensable in the modern digital ecosystem.

Software

Software was discussed as an essential driver of innovation, efficiency, and international growth. The Nordic software industry was highlighted for its exceptional engineering talent, technological penetration, and significant investment potential, although confidence and market nuances are vital for global success. Ethical considerations, AI integration, and operational efficiency were recurrent themes, emphasising the transformative impact of software on various sectors.

Overall, software is seen as a crucial element for societal advancement, fostering economic growth, improving workplace learning through AI, and addressing critical issues such as bias and privacy, with strong belief in its potential to create sustainable futures, streamline operations, and expand market reach.

Scaling alignment

The importance of aligning teams, strategy, and cash for international expansion was extensively covered in several sessions. A recurring theme was the necessity of having the right local partners who understand cultural nuances and have vital connections. The speakers emphasised that local expertise is crucial for navigating new markets effectively. Maintaining direct contact with customers was also highlighted as a strategy to gain insights and ensure product-market fit, helping companies make informed decisions and adapt their offerings to meet local demands.

Building robust advisory boards emerged as a key strategy for supporting international scaling. Advisory boards can offer guidance on strategy, execution, and cash management, helping companies tackle the complexities of global markets. Leveraging technological advancements, such as AI, to increase productivity and reduce costs was another point of discussion. The example of replacing a large number of programmers with fewer, highly skilled individuals and AI demonstrated how aligning teams and cash with technology can drive efficiency and growth.

Effective communication and consistent processes across all markets were stressed as essential for avoiding fragmentation and inefficiencies. Speakers recommended focusing on A-markets while remaining reactive in B-markets, starting with one market to learn and refine strategies before expanding further. Localisation of products and go-to-market strategies to meet specific needs was deemed crucial, with detailed market research and understanding of cultural preferences and regulatory differences being necessary for substantial revenue growth. The need for clear, shared sales processes and adaptable compensation plans to drive sales behaviour across regions was also discussed, ensuring that teams are motivated and aligned with the company's overall strategy.

Growth blockers

Multiple discussions highlighted key barriers to international expansion, emphasising the importance of understanding local market dynamics, cultural differences, and regulatory requirements. Companies often face challenges in finding the right partners who understand local markets, cultures, and languages, which can impede effective market entry. Thorough market research and localisation of both products and go-to-market strategies were commonly recommended to bridge cultural gaps and ensure compliance with regional regulations. Additionally, the complexity of managing communication across different time zones and channels was noted, with several speakers advising the implementation of CRM systems to track metrics and align sales processes efficiently.

A recurring theme was the necessity of building robust infrastructure and advisory boards to support international expansion. Establishing local entities can be time-consuming, and companies often use services like Employer of Record (EOR) to hire local talent and explore markets efficiently without immediate local entity setup. Advisory boards composed of experts can provide critical guidance on strategy, execution, and cash management, helping companies navigate new territories effectively. Leveraging AI for internal advantages and productivity improvements was also suggested to facilitate smoother expansion processes.

Several speakers stressed the importance of a gradual and confident approach to expansion, starting small and building momentum without overwhelming the organisation. Celebrating small wins and maintaining close communication with the new market team were recommended strategies to build trust and position the company for successful international growth. Companies were advised to narrow down target markets, focus on specific customer segments, and avoid spreading efforts too thin. By addressing these barriers and implementing coherent strategies, businesses can enhance their chances of successful international expansion.

Responsible AI

The discussions primarily emphasised the ethical risks associated with integrating AI, particularly machine learning systems, into various products. Concerns highlighted include privacy, transparency, and accountability, stemming from the opaque nature of machine learning algorithms which often utilise personal data. These issues necessitate the formulation of new ethical principles to manage and mitigate the risks posed by such technologies. Organisations and governments have endeavoured to address these concerns through the creation of AI ethics principles. However, these principles have faced criticism for being overly general, often conflicting, and lacking effective enforcement mechanisms.

The criticism extends to accusations of ethics washing, where companies purport to uphold ethical standards without implementing substantial changes. It has been noted that merely listing ethical principles does not equate to undertaking the rigorous work required for genuine ethical practice. The generality of these principles means they can be interpreted in various ways, leading to discrepancies and conflicts. Furthermore, these principles typically possess a narrow technical focus, directly responding to the challenges posed by machine learning but failing to address broader societal impacts. For instance, algorithmic bias, particularly in facial recognition software, can lead to systemic injustices if not approached holistically.

A broader perspective on AI ethics is advocated, one that considers long-term societal impacts and the disruptive nature of rapid technological advancements. Understanding AI within the context of historical technological transformations may enable stakeholders to better anticipate and mitigate potential negative consequences. This approach calls for a comprehensive understanding of AI's broader societal implications, beyond mere technical considerations, to ensure ethical risks are effectively managed. By doing so, stakeholders can foster a more responsible and equitable integration of AI technologies into various products.

Clarity in chaos

The discussions on strategic decision-making in the face of global uncertainties were primarily focused on understanding macroeconomic trends and their implications. Emphasis was placed on the impact of geopolitical factors, such as US-China trade relations and other international events, which have caused significant volatility in financial markets. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for making informed strategic calls, as they can drastically affect investment landscapes. Experts pointed out the importance of staying informed about global events and their potential impacts on market volatility, which is essential for navigating uncertain times.

Several key macroeconomic themes were highlighted, including the anticipated US economic slowdown and the Federal Reserve's potential responses. The possibility of a soft landing for the US economy was discussed, contingent on how the Federal Reserve manages interest rate cuts under market and political pressures. There was also a notable focus on the European market, particularly the strong labour markets and fiscal stimulus in Germany, which are expected to drive resurgence. Businesses were advised to consider geopolitical shifts and adapt their supply chains to mitigate risks and explore new opportunities amidst global uncertainties.

In addition to macroeconomic perspectives, the transaction market was examined, particularly in relation to capital raises and mergers and acquisitions (M&A). The volatility index (VIX) was identified as a critical factor influencing transaction timing and corporate decision-making. Despite a decline in transaction volumes due to macroeconomic uncertainty, there was optimism about the future, supported by stable stock markets and debt funding. Strategies for navigating the M&A market included early preparation, building long-term relationships, and securing buyer interest before initiating processes. These approaches were suggested to help companies better manage the unpredictability and make more robust strategic decisions in a volatile global market.

Perspectives

Gustav Lagercrantz
– on inspiration and empowerment:

Be proud, bold, and confident—you are shaping the next generation of success stories.

R. Michael Anderson
– on true confidence:

Real confidence means trusting that whatever arises, you and your team will handle it.

Alice Burks
– on onboarding as a strategic lever:

If you get onboarding wrong, you undermine your entire talent strategy.

Potential future topics

Cybersecurity strategies for international expansion

As Nordic companies continue to expand globally, the need to protect sensitive data and ensure robust cybersecurity measures is paramount. This session will explore the latest cybersecurity threats and trends, providing practical strategies for safeguarding information across various international markets. Experts will discuss how to build resilient cybersecurity frameworks that align with local regulations and minimise risks during international expansion.

Attendees will gain insights into best practices for managing cybersecurity across different regions, including the importance of collaboration with local cybersecurity agencies and partners. The session will also cover the integration of AI and machine learning in enhancing cybersecurity measures, ensuring companies stay ahead of potential threats.

Sustainable growth: Integrating ESG principles in international scaling

With increasing emphasis on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria, Nordic companies must incorporate these principles into their international growth strategies. This session will address the importance of sustainable practices and how they can drive long-term success and enhance brand reputation globally. Experts will share insights on aligning business operations with ESG standards and the benefits of adopting sustainable practices.

Attendees will learn about the impact of ESG on investor relations, market entry strategies, and customer preferences. The session will highlight case studies of companies that have successfully integrated ESG principles into their business models, demonstrating the competitive advantage and positive impact on global expansion.

Leveraging data analytics for strategic decision-making

Data analytics has become a critical tool for making informed business decisions, especially in the context of international expansion. This session will delve into the ways Nordic companies can harness the power of data analytics to drive strategic planning and operational efficiency. Experts will discuss the latest advancements in data analytics technologies and methodologies, providing practical examples of their application in real-world scenarios.

Attendees will explore how data-driven insights can enhance market research, customer segmentation, and personalised marketing strategies. The session will also cover challenges related to data privacy and compliance across different regions, offering solutions to ensure ethical and effective use of data in global operations.

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