

By Bob Papper, Michael Gerhard and Joe Misiewicz

ANOTHER GROWTH YEAR FOR NEWS AND STAFF

RTNDA's latest survey shows that 1996 was another strong year for television and radio news and staff expansion, but there are some signs that the enormous growth of the past few years is about to slow down.

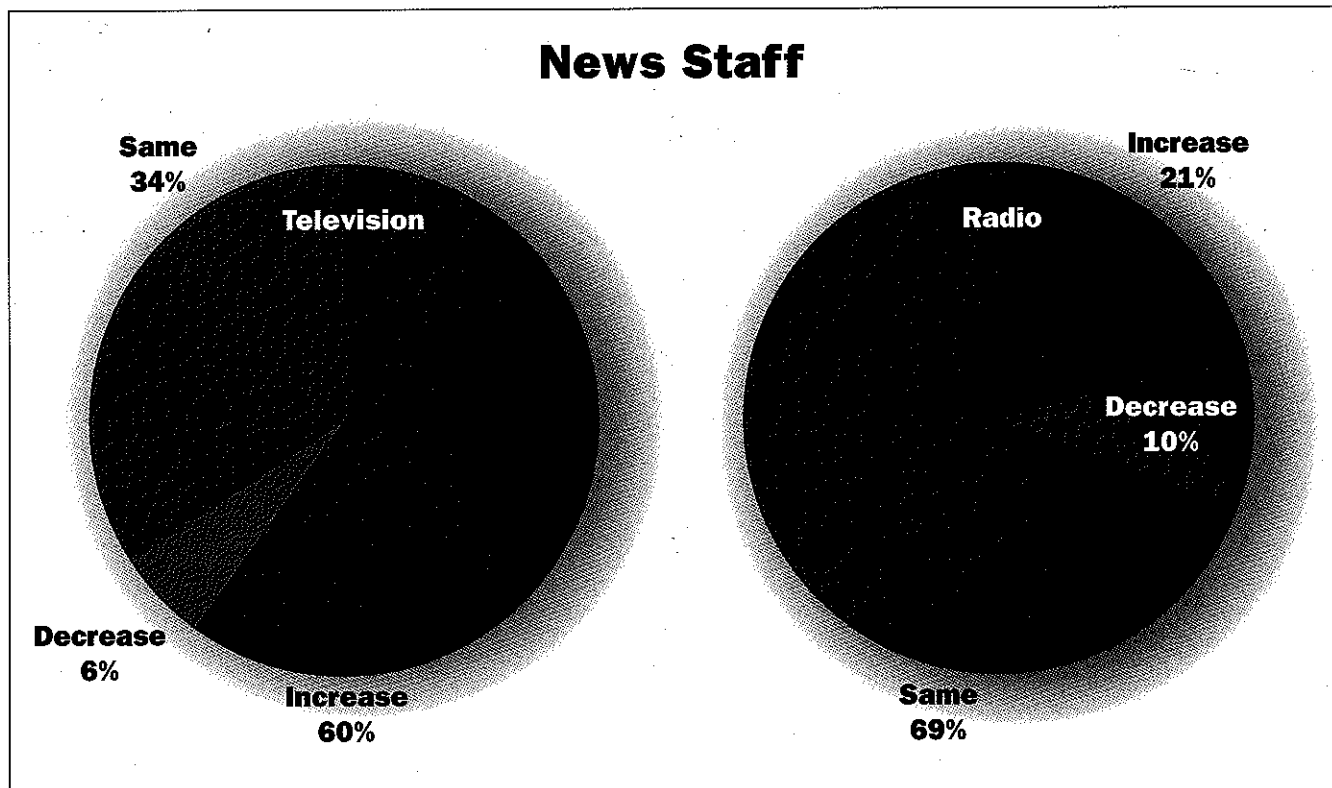
"I think that if '94, '95, '96 were years of aggressive news expansion, '97 and '98 will see growth cycles slow dramatically into mild growth expansion," according to Jerry Gumbert, senior vice president at Audience Research & Development in Dallas. Gumbert says this follows the same pattern as the 1980s. "We had three to four years of real dynamic expansion into the morning news time period," says Gumbert, "but then when most had done it, and the ones who didn't chose not to, growth slowed."

In the 1980s there were also staff cutbacks. That shouldn't be the case now. "It's hard to predict," says Barbara Frye, director of talent placement services at Frank N. Magid Associates in Marion, IA, "But unless the economy goes south, I don't see painful layoffs and cutbacks like the kind we went through [in the '80s]."

Although fewer TV news directors expect to expand news this year than last, the RTNDA/Ball State University Survey found no TV news director who expected to cut staff in 1997.

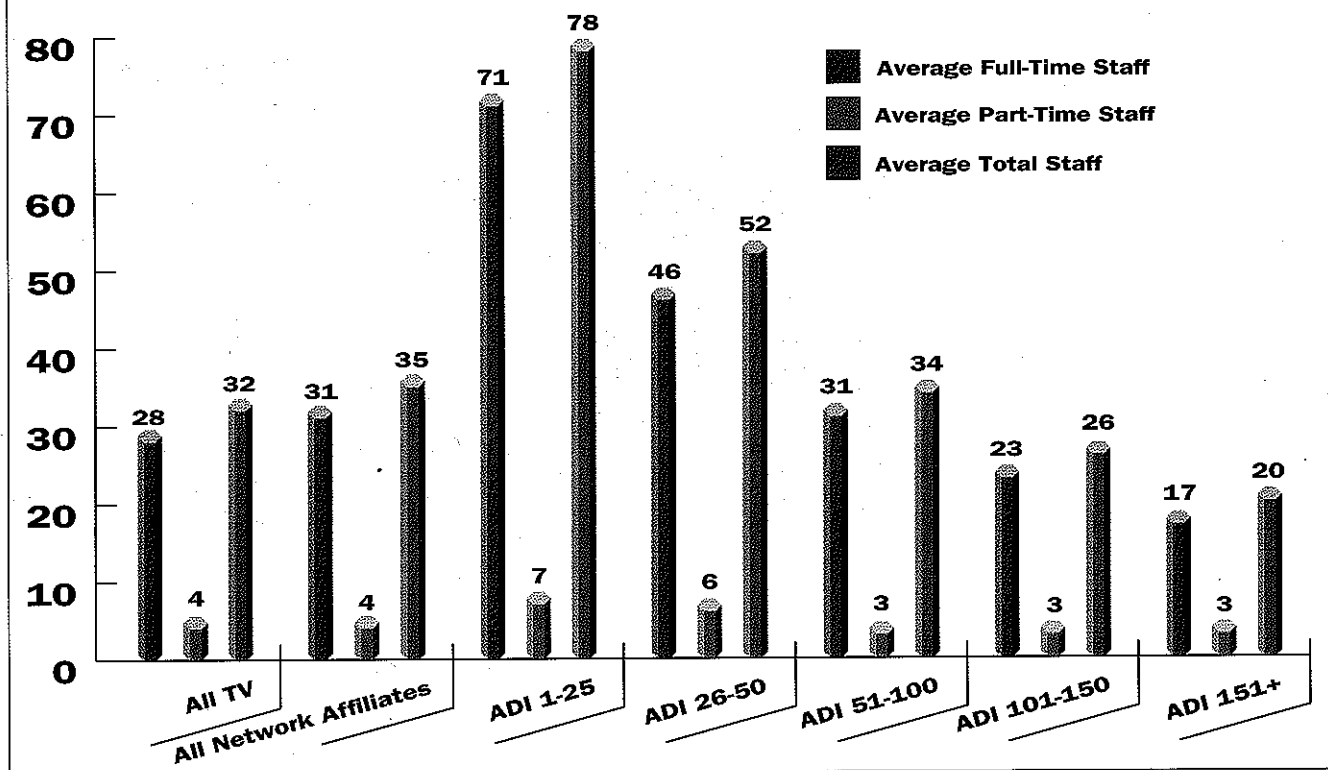
News Growth Areas

Part of the difference is that there are more growth opportunities now. In addition to news in more dayparts, more and more stations are putting news on other outlets. On the air, Gumbert sees three growth time periods: early weekday morning, weekend morning and the 4 p.m. hour. In 1996, many stations added local news in the morning at 6 a.m., and if they had already done that, they started the news at 5:30 a.m. Morning news growth has been so strong that 6:30 a.m. is now the second most common half-



Overall, TV figures are very close to last year's, but radio expansion is up noticeably from 1995. For television, market size made little difference in the likelihood of a station changing its staff size, although stations in the Northeast were a little more likely to expand. In radio, the larger the market, the more likely that the news staff grew. FM-only stations were the most likely to grow, and stations in the Midwest were the most likely to expand.

TV Staff Size



There was little variation in the numbers by region, but overall, Fox affiliates had a higher average number of both full-time employees and part-timers.

hour of the day (after 6 p.m.) for stations to run local news. The 6 a.m. slot is the fourth most popular, and 21 percent of the television stations in the survey reported running morning news at 5:30 a.m. The RTNDF/Ball State University Survey actually found few stations running news in the 4-5 p.m. slot.

Gumbert sees the next round of expansion in nontraditional venues: local and regional cable channels. "That is perhaps right now the most dynamic news expansion we see around the country," says Gumbert. "We're closing in on as many as 30 24-hour cable news channels either up and running or will be by September."

Some of those are done by local broadcasters and some by the cable operators themselves. "The competition is no

longer exclusively broadcaster to broadcaster," notes Gumbert.

"There's a need to expand 'shelf space,'" says Frye, referring to new opportunities to run the news. "That may mean producing news on someone else's outlet, whether that's cable or another station. And then there's the Internet."

"Look at the landscape," says Gumbert. "Local cable growth is the most dynamic right now...and will be, and station growth elsewhere will be second. Expansion on TV stations in nontraditional time periods—that has slowed dramatically. Broadcasters in the future will reach outside to expand local news' reach. The Internet is huge in expansion. Conventional wisdom says if you're there first and do it well, you might be the dominant player in the local area. It's all about extending your local brand into nontraditional media."

Staff Growth Areas

Stations reported adding staff in 1996, mostly to accommodate current or past news expansion. Overall, 60 percent of television stations reported staff increases in 1996; only 6 percent reported cutbacks.

Stations added a full range of people, but Frye says the requests she got were

the same old story. "Can you help me find a good producer? It's hard; there are not enough to go around," says Frye.

"It's very difficult to find producers who are not under contract. They're making more money, and the chance to go up 10 marketplaces for three or four thousand dollars doesn't impress them. They know they're in demand." Frye says she still sees producers making huge market leaps because news directors are so desperate that they'll take a chance on potential.

What else are news directors looking for? "Reporters who don't want to anchor and will never ask to anchor," says Frye. "Meteorologists with an AMS seal and personality, and they don't necessarily go together. I very seldom get requests for sportscasters."

Frye says finding good talent has become harder and harder. "There are not enough quality people to go around because a contract is now the norm, so people can't go; they're not available."

Frye says she's now seeing a new trend in management vacancies. "For the past six months, there have been 30 or more news director openings at any one time, spread out throughout market sizes. That's a lot...It's more and more

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ABOUT THE SURVEY

The RTNDF/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 1996 among all 4,186 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 843 radio stations. Valid responses came from 653 television stations (97.1 percent) and 331 radio stations (41.6 percent).

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acceptable for news directors to become general managers, and probably 50 have done that in the last three years. Now there are not enough news director candidates to go around. It's now very competitive, and the prices are high. And that will continue and probably get worse."

At the Station Level

WJLA-TV in Washington (ABC affiliate, market #7) runs the same three and a half hours of news per weekday that it has since 1995 when the station added a half-hour in the morning. But the station added four hours of news a week in 1996—two hours Saturday morning and two hours Sunday morning. Vice President and News Director Gary Wordlaw says the station is "keeping its options open" on future expansion. Wordlaw says that they added about 10 staffers in 1996—to a total of around 114. The 10 included a little bit of just about every position, including beefing up the investigative unit to 14. Wordlaw considers them "the class of the industry" with awards to prove it.

Wordlaw says he doesn't anticipate any staff changes this year, "maybe add a position here and there, certainly no cut-backs."

KPHO-TV in Phoenix (CBS affiliate, market #17) runs two hours and 38 minutes of local news plus a blended hour (with CBS) in the morning. That includes an eight-minute newscast at 10 p.m. (four minutes of news; two minutes of commercials and one minute each of sports and weather). News Director John Cardenas says that he hates it, but he sees the business side of it. "It's No. 2 in the ratings at 10 p.m....If we did a full-blown newscast, it could fall to No. 4 (of five)." In the reshuffling of Phoenix television two years ago, the station went from an independent to a CBS affiliate.

The station added an hour of news and four newpeople last year. The staff now stands at 57 full time and 11 part time.

Cardenas would like to see the 10 p.m. news go to a half-hour this year, "depending on the economy and competitive factors." And Cardenas would like to expand

into weekend mornings. "I just think the more news you do, the more exposure and credibility you can get from it." Cardenas doesn't expect to increase staff unless he expands programming.

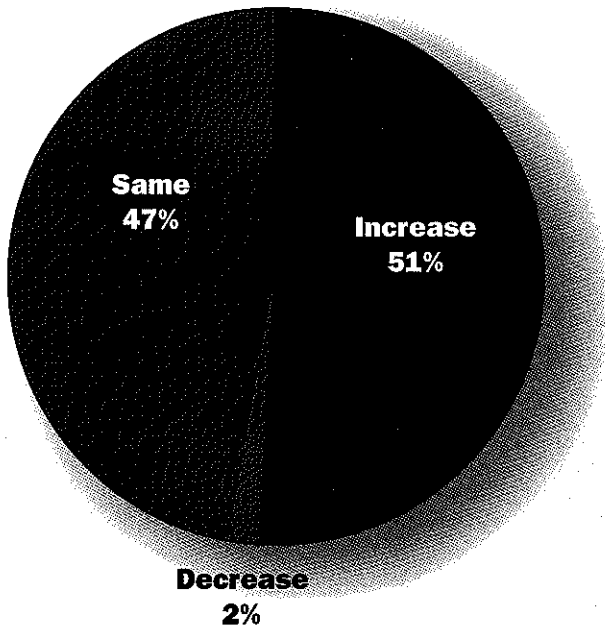
WBAL-TV in Baltimore (NBC affiliate, market #23) added news in 1995 to bring the station to more than four and half hours per weekday. In 1996 the only news addition was a half-hour on Sunday mornings (to a total of three hours), but News Director Katherine Green says that they were running pretty thin, and the staff expanded. They added two in sports to handle the Ravens and one full time and one part time to handle an aggressive Web site.

All told, the station has about 70 people full time and a few part-timers. This year Green expects to do some reallocation of resources and would like to add a reporter. "It looks like it's back to tighter purse strings," says Green. She says she gave up a lot of overtime to add staff. Now she's "looking at overlapping positions, blurring some traditional lines" between jobs. Green says she does not expect to add any news this year, and she sees the real expansion opportunities as being on the Web. "Anyone who thinks you can't make money on the Web is an idiot," Green says, and also suggests

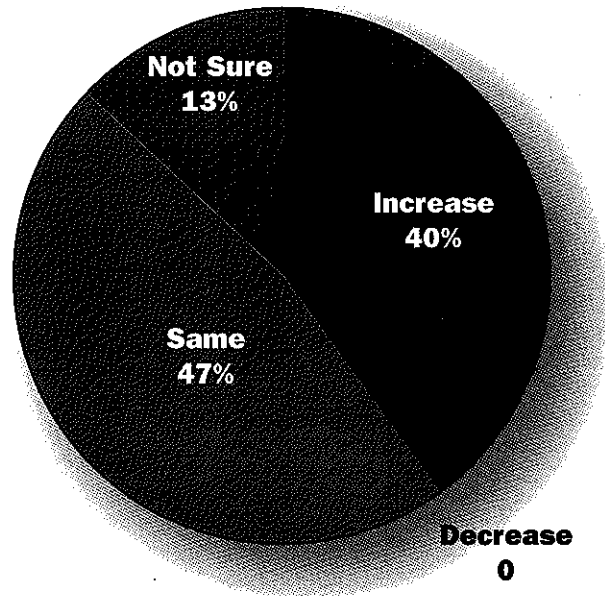
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Amount of TV News

In 1996



Planned for 1997



In 1996, the bigger the staff, the more likely that the station added news. For 1997 the only real variation is that the biggest markets and Fox affiliates are more likely to be unsure of their plans. The percentages up and down for 1996 are exactly what news directors predicted the year before. News directors also are a little less likely to expect more news expansion this year.

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“short-sighted and insane” for people who don’t see the future on the Internet. “The opportunities it presents are enormous.” Green says they’re busy making alliances, and while the station isn’t making a profit on the Internet yet, she says they’ll “have a rate card on the street,” and the money will come.

KSTU-TV in Salt Lake City (Fox affiliate, market #36) is now running two and a half hours of news a day—up an hour and a half in 1996. They’ve been running a 9 p.m. newscast and added one at noon and an hour in the morning. It was also a big year for staff. News Director Geoff Roth says that he added 12 people full time and one part time in 1996. The station now has 44 full time and three part time.

Roth says that he’s looking at expanding again in the morning, although there are no firm plans yet. Even so, he’s hoping to add three to four more people. “Traditionally, we haven’t gone head to head [with other network affiliates],” says Roth, “but now we are, and we’re doing pretty well.”

WHIO-TV in Dayton, OH, (CBS affiliate, market #53) is running more than five and a half hours of news a day, although not all of it runs on WHIO. The station runs a half-hour of news on cable at 10 p.m. “We do so much news as it is,” says News Director Jennifer Rigby. “I don’t see expansion right now, not at this point.” Rigby sees the cable station as having a lot of opportunity—and the possible next area of expansion.

Rigby says that the station has “more than 50” in news and added two and a half positions in 1996, including a reporter, producer and part-time editor. Rigby says that she has no plans to add staff this year.

KTBC-TV in Austin, TX, (Fox affiliate, market #64) still runs more than four and a half hours of news each weekday, although it’s a different four and a half hours than they started with at the beginning of the year. News Director Rob Martin says that they dropped a 5:30 p.m. world news program but added a half-hour (at 5:30 a.m.) to their morning news.

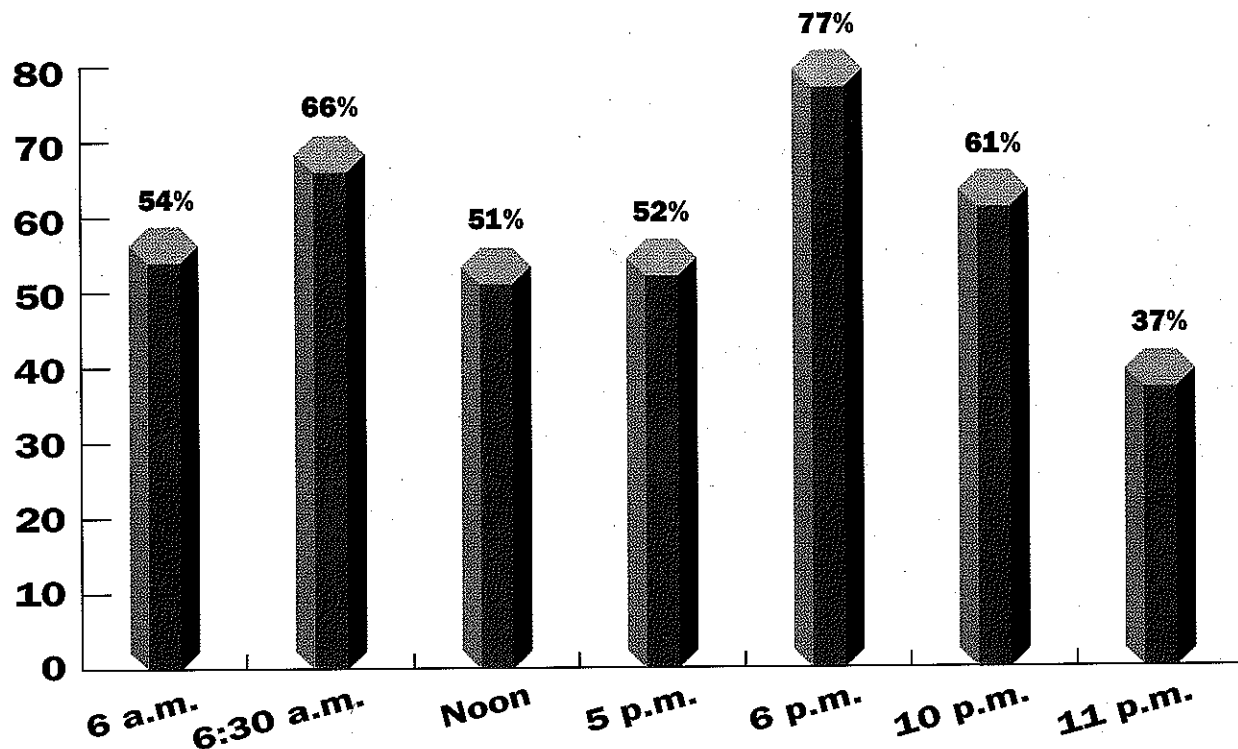
Martin says they’ve been talking about adding weekend morning news, but that they have no plans for changes this year.

Martin says the station added a couple of photographers and a couple of field producers during the past year, and they now have about 58 people. As with news, they have no plans to add or cut back staff this year.

“We’re doing a ton of news,” says News Director Tom Bier at WISC-TV in Madison, WI, (CBS affiliate, market #83). That’s five and a half hours a day, but not all on WISC. 1996 saw expanded news in the morning and weekend and the addition of two half-hours on WISC 2—their cable station. “The challenge is to make sure it’s not hurting the ‘mother ship,’ which is the 5, 6, and 10 p.m.,” says Bier, “but we need to find other outlets.” Bier says that he isn’t sure exactly where things are headed, but he’s optimistic that the cable channel is going to grow.

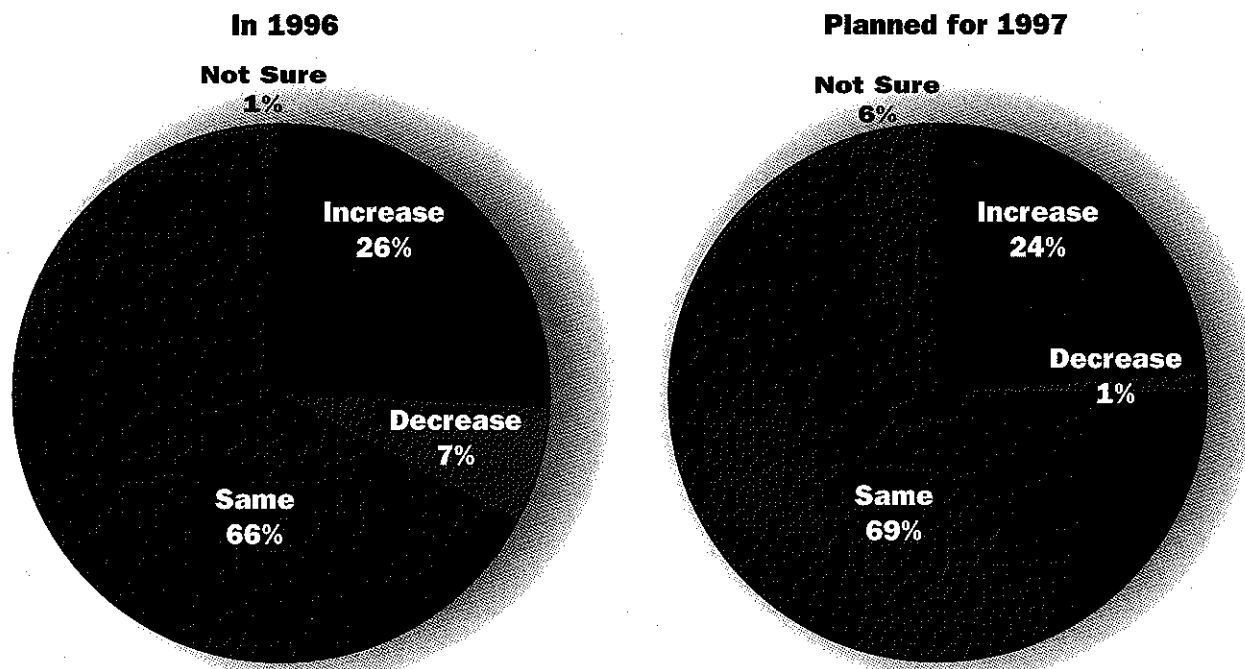
Bier says that he has around 50 people in news plus 20 in production who report to him. Overall, the station added about 10 people in 1996, including at least one full time and two part time in news. Bier thinks staff size will stay the same, at least for now. “The station has always been good about it,” says Bier. “If we add

Popular Times for Local TV News



Among weekday newscasts, the traditional 6 p.m. newscast is clearly the most popular. But expansion in the morning gives 6:30 a.m. and 6 a.m. two of the top four slots for news.

Amount of Radio News



AM-only, major-market stations and stations in the West were the least likely to add news in 1996. Looking ahead in 1997, AM-only and Western stations again expect little growth, but almost no stations expect to cut back on news.

projects, we add people.”

News Director Al Aamodt says they don't do enough news at WDAY-TV in Fargo, ND, (ABC affiliate, market #112). “If you're not doing local news, I think you're hosed,” says Aamodt. “That's where it is.”

WDAY runs three half-hour newscasts each weekday: morning, 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. plus cut-ins. The morning show is new in 1996. Aamodt says he hopes to expand the news within the next six months to a year.

TV shares some staff with radio, but Aamodt has 14 full time, one part time plus two in weather and seven in sports (shared with radio). Right now, he says he's down two reporters. When he gets fully staffed, they'll be up one from a year ago, but he says it's not easy to get people to come to North Dakota, even though “it's a pretty good place to work and a darn good place to live.”

KHSL-TV in Chico/Redding, CA, (CBS affiliate, market #130) runs just under four hours of news per weekday (plus an hour each, Saturday and Sunday) with a full-time staff of 25 and a few part-timers. News Director Bruce Lang says the station added a little more than an hour in 1996 and five or six staffers, including two photographers, a reporter, a producer and one in weather.

Lang says his staff is stretched pretty

thin. “I don't think more is better....Basically what's happening is we're in a culture driven by money. The tail is wagging the dog. I'm not sure that makes sense. If you get more news, you get more avails.”

Lang says he's been under a hiring freeze since the first of the year, which has kept him from filling two vacancies (to 27 full time). “We launched a ship, put it in deep water, and the company took two of our oarsmen. I feel a little betrayed.”

Lang says they have no plans for news expansion. “We're not going to stretch the rubber band any tighter than it is.”

WMBB-TV also runs three and a half hours of news per weekday in Panama City, FL (ABC affiliate, market #159). They added a half-hour in the morning in 1996 and expect to add another half-hour this year. News Director Larche Hardy says that there's also been some discussion about weekend morning “maybe next year.”

Hardy says he has 18 full-time people in news, but that's a little deceptive. He also has control of the production department. That means he has 35 people overall, and some of the production people do things that newspeople might elsewhere.

WETM-TV in Elmira/Binghamton, NY, (NBC affiliate, market #169) just went from one and a half hours of news per weekday to two and a half with its

new morning show that debuted in January. The next area of growth, according to News Director David Schifter, will be a 5 p.m. newscast. But Schifter says those plans are vague, and the launch date is likely to be next year. Schifter has 20 people full time plus a physician part time for medical reporting.

RADIO

Overall, 1996 was a good year for radio news, too. At most stations, news and staff held its own, and stations were twice as likely to increase staff as to cut it (21 percent to 10 percent) and almost four times as likely to add news as cut it back (26 percent to 7 percent). Nearly a quarter of all radio news directors in the RTNDF/Ball State University Survey expect to increase news this year while almost none expect to cut news back.

WJJZ-FM in Philadelphia (smooth jazz, major market) runs six newscasts per day, all in morning drive, all about a minute and a half long. News Director Bill Brosey says that they touch on the big stories: lifestyle news, human interest, health and kicker stories.

Brosey is the news department. He gathers information on the phone but uses no sound in the newscasts. Brosey says that the staffing and amount of news have

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been constant since the station moved to jazz in 1993, and there are no plans for any changes in either staff or news.

KOMO-AM in Seattle (news/talk, major market) does news at the top and bottom of the hour throughout the day, along with ABC News, and the station has increased the number of elements in the news in morning drive in the past year. Managing Editor Josh Kerns says that he has nine people full time and two part time, along with Metro Traffic and the ability to draw on KOMO-TV reporters and use their sound.

As big as the staff is, it's down from past years (when the station was "full service"). Kerns figures they've probably lost five or six people through attrition in the last few years and says that 20 years ago the station had closer to 20 people in news.

Kerns says, "The good news is that they will not be losing anybody; the bad news is I would like to be a lot bigger." But Kerns says that "holding steady is encouraging for those of us (in the radio news business)."

Kerns notes that Seattle is a "very educated and aware market" with about seven stations doing some form of straight news or news/talk, including two public radio stations.

Between the audience in Fort Wayne, IN, on WBCL-FM and the audience in northwest Ohio on simulcast WBCY-FM, the two stations cover a large-market audience with a mixture of adult contemporary Christian music and syndicated talk. The stations run six min-

utes of local news per hour in drive times, along with AP news, and they run 15 minutes at noon.

News Director Jim Stanley has a total of two people full time in news and four part time (and all the part-timers work full time at the station, just part time in news). Stanley is starting his ninth year at the station and says it hasn't changed much in the last few years, although they did cut back AP news in nondrive times from five minutes to two minutes. Stanley says he's "encouraged" because he sees more radio news activity on the street. WBCL is a religious station, but Stanley says they "cover the news like anyone else," although they also cover "hot religious issues and major religious conventions."

Stanley says that they're adding a third station, WBCJ-FM, near Lima, OH, so he hopes to add another full-time newscaster to move to more regional news coverage along with Fort Wayne.

The stations are noncommercial. Stanley says that most of their operating money comes during their two-day fundraiser every January, when they take in about \$830,000 in phone pledges (more than 90 percent of which actually come in). In addition the stations sell underwriting, including in newscasts.

"Our niche is local news," says News Director Margie Shafer at KVON-AM (news/talk) and KVVN-FM (adult contemporary) in Napa, CA, (medium to large market). "We're in the shadow of San Francisco (about 60 miles away), so people can get all the

San Francisco stations." Shafer says they run 29 local newscasts per day on the AM and "really short" newscasts twice an hour in morning and afternoon drive and noon on the FM. Shafer is the only newscaster full time, but she has a part-time producer/reporter and two people part time doing news on the weekends. Some of the weekend news was new in 1996, and one of the part-timers was added last year.

"In my ideal world, I'd like to have another person full time," says Shafer. She says that would enable them to cover more meetings and activities in the community and cut back on reporting on the phone.

"This really is community radio," says Shafer. "We do things very small time, like birthdays, lost pets; that's what it's about. We have swap shop every day. It's not that small (in audience), but it's got that kind of feel to it."

WINY-AM in Putnam, CT, (adult contemporary, oldies, talk; medium market) covers northeast Connecticut with two full-time newscasters and one part time. News Director Dave Ward says that they run local news 24 hours a day—live from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and prerecorded the rest of the time. "News is the mainstay of the station," says Ward. "We're the only real source of local news." The station runs four minutes of local news (along with AP news) on the hour and half-hour through much of the day, with 15-minute newscasts three times a day (8 a.m., noon and 5 p.m.).

The prerecorded overnight newscasts are new within the past year, but Ward says that no staff was added to do it. They're thinking about adding a Sunday morning news program, and Ward says

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TV News by Affiliation

	Number of Stations	Number with Local News	Percent with Local News	Number without Local News
ABC	192	183	95%	9
CBS	183	178	97%	5
Fox	169	72*	43%	97
NBC	193	187	97%	6
Independent**	251	78	31%	173
PBS	198	66	33%	132
Totals	1,186	764	64%	422

The RTNDF/Ball State University Survey found that of 1,186 nonsatellite, operational television stations, 764 (64 percent) run local news. Unlike many numbers in the survey, these figures are census numbers—based on personal contact with every station in the country.

* Fox number includes 18 stations where the local news is produced by another station and run on the Fox affiliate.

** Independents include UPN, WB, Univision, Telemundo and some smaller networks.

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he's planning to hire another part-time stringer to handle night meetings and limited air work.

In Midland, TX, (medium market), KCRS-AM (news and sports) runs three-minute local newscasts hourly all day. KCRS-FM (country) runs news mostly in morning drive. Jesse Grimes says that he's "nominally" the news director, "but I'm the only person I direct." And that's just part time, although he's full time at the station. When Grimes started at the station in 1988, they had three full-time people in news. Other than Grimes, the last person left three years ago. But Grimes says that it's not like others have taken over in news. "We're the only ones who really do anything in news," says Grimes. "I don't see anyone else when I go out and cover things."

Grimes says there's no talk about any

changes in news. "News is not a big ratings gatherer here," says Grimes. "We have a small core of news listeners."

News Director Curtis Dean says that local news in Spencer, IA, (small to medium market) is radio, not TV; he says the 10 p.m. local news (for eight to nine minutes) is "probably one of the better-listened-to newscasts of the day because people tune in as they're getting ready to hit the hay."

Along with the evening news they run extensive local newscasts in morning drive, noon and afternoon drive on KICD-AM (news, information, middle of the road) and KICD-FM (modern country). They run less news on KIGL-FM (adult contemporary).

Local news has grown in the last year. Dean says that when CBS cut back its 7 p.m. news from 15 minutes to 10 minutes, the station added five minutes of local news. Dean says they also expanded the noon news and revised the way they read funeral announcements.

Dean is the only full-time person in news, but he has a part-time news editor who is also the assistant weather director. The station takes weather seriously, with two National Weather Association meteorologists and its own radar. Staff announcers also help with the news. That's made meeting coverage a little easier, Dean says. Otherwise, it's "not much different than 15 to 20 years ago."

KOTO-FM (free form) in Telluride, CO, (very small market) may be the epitome of community radio. The ski area has 4,000-5,000 permanent residents, although that can double on a good ski weekend. Telluride's only radio station is a public sta-

tion with just five full-time employees, so it depends heavily on the 200 volunteers who handle most of the air shifts. Jon Kovash is the full-time news director and has three-quarter-time help. They produce extensive daily newscasts and also produce a monthly regional news magazine that airs on several Western-slope stations. "Anybody can come in off the street and record up to a three- to five-minute commentary for the news," says Kovash. "They run us ragged around election time."

"People really rely on us," says Kovash. "We run carpool announcements and lost dogs." Kovash would like to increase staff to expand his regional coverage, and he's considering a daily regional report that could be posted on their Web site.

The noncommercial station gets a stipend from the Town Council and conducts on-air fund drives twice a year, but the community decided 20 years ago that there would be no underwriting, and they've stuck with that. Among their biggest fund-raisers: a ski swap, a Halloween Party, the annual Duck Race and the station's exclusive Beer Booth at the local Bluegrass Festival. ■

STATE RADIO NETWORKS

State radio networks generally fared less well in 1996 than stations. While 24 percent of state networks reported increasing staff, 38 percent said there was no change, and another 38 percent said they had cut back. Overall, the average network staff dropped a half of a full-time position to .64 while part-timers held steady at two. Twelve percent of state networks reported doing more news in 1996 than 1995, while 38 percent reported little or no change. But 1997 may be better. Overall, 62 percent said they expect to increase news this year, while 12 percent expect to cut back, 12 percent remain the same and 14 percent are unsure.

Bob Papper is associate professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Michael Gerhard is an assistant professor of telecommunications at Ball State University. Joe Misiewicz is a professor of telecommunications at Ball State University. Both have extensive industry and research experience. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation.

Radio Staff Size

	Average Full-Time Staff	Average Part-Time Staff	Average Total Staff
All Radio	1.9	1.3	3.2
AM Only	2.2	1.3	3.5
FM Only	1.4	1.6	3
AM/FM	2	1.1	3.1
Major Market	4.2	1.6	5.8
Large Market	2.3	1.7	4
Medium Market	1.3	1.1	2.4
Small Market	1.4	1.3	2.7

These numbers represent little change from the last few years. Differences by region of the country were negligible.