

Salaries Slide Backwards
By Bob Papper

Overall, the Annual RTNDA/Ball State University Survey found that television and radio news salaries fell in 2002 from 2001. TV salaries were down 2.3 percent; radio dropped 1.6 percent. Then the situation gets worse. Inflation in 2002 ran 2.4 percent, which means that real wages (after inflation) actually fell 4.7 percent in television news and 4.0 percent in radio news. A year ago, salaries were mostly stagnant; real wages fell slightly with 2001's more modest rate of inflation (1.6 percent). For the last few years before that, salary increases had been running between 3 and 4 percent—just a bit above inflation.

Most job categories fell, but not all of them equally; see the various tables for the various levels of this year's salary losers.

Television News Salaries - 2003

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$70,400	\$63,000	\$14,750	\$202,000
Assistant News Director	59,700	55,000	7,000	142,500
Managing Editor	49,400	45,000	22,000	127,000
Executive Producer	51,100	42,000	19,000	127,500
Assignment Editor	31,200	30,000	2,000	62,500
News Producer	28,500	26,000	17,000	77,500
News Anchor	62,500	48,000	5,000	262,500
Weathercaster	52,600	42,500	18,000	200,000
Sports Anchor	44,500	35,000	11,400	160,000
News Reporter	31,500	26,000	13,000	214,000
News Writer	27,500	25,000	10,400	55,000
News Assistant	24,000	22,000	7,000	55,000
Sports Reporter	27,600	24,500	13,000	70,000
Photographer	26,300	25,000	6,000	80,000
Tape Editor	22,500	21,250	8,000	62,500
Graphics Specialist	24,900	24,000	9,000	40,000
Internet Specialist	28,900	27,500	16,000	50,000

With an overall drop of 2.3 percent and inflation running at 2.4 percent, real wages in TV news fell 4.7 percent. Every position in television news except news assistant either dropped or remained the same from a year ago. Given inflation, that meant all jobs (except news assistant) actually lost ground. Remaining the same: assignment editor, sports anchor, news reporter, and photographer. Every other position fell. Most dropped only slightly, although managing editor and executive producer took bigger hits than the others—each dropping around 10 percent from the year before. Overall, the numbers suggest that as staff turned over, new people were hired at lower salaries than the people they replaced. The median—or midpoint—is the best gauge of what people typically make.

Five Year Median Television News Salary Comparisons 1998 to 2003

	2003	1998	Percentage Change
News Director	\$63,000	\$53,000	+18.9%
Assistant News Director	55,000	46,000	+19.6%
Managing Editor	45,000	46,500	-3.2%
Executive Producer	42,000	44,000	-4.5%
Assignment Editor	30,000	27,000	+11.1%
News Producer	26,000	24,000	+8.3%

News Anchor	48,000	41,000	+17.1%
Weathercaster	42,500	37,000	+14.9%
Sports Anchor	35,000	30,500	+14.8%
News Reporter	26,000	23,000	+13.0%
News Writer	25,000	20,000	+25.0%
News Assistant	22,000	18,000	+22.2%
Sports Reporter	24,500	21,500	+14.0%
Photographer	25,000	23,000	+8.7%
Tape Editor	21,250	22,000*	-3.4%
Graphics Specialist	24,000	32,500	-26.2%
Internet Specialist	27,500	26,000	+5.8%

Over the same five-year period, inflation grew by 12.2 percent, so real growth in wages over the last five years is the difference between the listed change and 12.2. The biggest winners are near the bottom of the food chain: news writers and news assistants. Other winners: news director, assistant news director, news anchor, weathercaster, sports anchor, news reporter and sports reporter. Positions where growth failed to keep up with inflation: managing editor, executive producer, assignment editor, news producer, photographer, tape editor, graphics specialist and Internet specialist.

* 1999 Data

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size - 2003

	1 – 25	26 – 50	51 – 100	101-150	150+
News Director	\$92,500	\$100,000	\$76,000	\$56,000	\$45,000
Assistant News Director	99,000	75,000	55,000	40,000	41,000
Managing Editor	65,000	50,000	45,000	32,000	26,000
Executive Producer	77,500	55,000	40,000	32,000	30,000
Assignment Editor	38,300	31,000	30,000	28,000	21,000
News Producer	40,000	35,000	27,700	22,400	20,000
News Anchor	90,000	93,500	60,000	44,000	30,000
Weathercaster	75,000	77,000	50,000	39,400	28,500
Sports Anchor	72,500	72,000	42,500	30,400	22,000
News Reporter	54,300	40,000	28,300	23,000	18,000
News Writer	36,000	24,500	20,000	20,300	*
News Assistant	35,000	26,500	22,000	17,500	13,000
Sports Reporter	30,000	40,000	25,800	21,000	18,000
Photographer	35,000	32,000	25,800	22,000	18,000
Tape Editor	31,000	25,000	20,500	17,000	15,000
Graphics Specialist	32,500	23,000	25,000	22,500	17,800
Internet Specialist	35,000	35,000	30,000	25,000	16,800

As always, with rare exception, the bigger the market the bigger the salary. The salaries for the top 25 markets probably understate top salary levels because a number of the biggest stations in that category did not fill out the salary data. Those omissions have little effect overall but will understate 1-25 in this table. There were no consistent trends by geography. ABC affiliates paid a little less than the others, and news salaries at PBS stations were a lot lower for almost all positions. * Insufficient data.

Median TV News Salaries by Staff Size - 2003

	51+	31-50	21-30	11-20	1-10
News Director	\$100,000	\$75,000	\$56,000	\$45,000	\$41,500
Assistant News Director	75,000	55,000	40,500	65,000	34,000
Managing Editor	50,000	40,000	45,000	26,000	32,500
Executive Producer	55,000	40,000	32,000	30,000	30,000
Assignment Editor	34,000	30,000	26,000	21,000	29,300
News Producer	34,000	27,300	22,000	20,000	30,200
News Anchor	89,000	50,000	40,000	30,000	35,000
Weathercaster	75,000	45,000	35,000	28,500	30,000
Sports Anchor	56,300	39,300	30,400	22,500	25,000
News Reporter	40,000	27,800	22,000	20,000	24,300
News Writer	30,000	24,000	20,300	*	*
News Assistant	35,000	19,500	9,500	15,000	15,000
Sports Reporter	32,000	25,000	18,000	20,500	18,000
Photographer	32,500	25,000	20,000	20,000	22,500
Tape Editor	26,000	20,000	16,500	20,000	18,000
Graphics Specialist	30,000	22,500	20,000	25,000	*
Internet Specialist	35,000	26,000	23,000	*	*

Generally, the larger the news staff, the higher the salary. The salary variations among some of the smaller news departments reflect the mix of small news departments in very small markets along with small departments in some of the large and major markets. * Insufficient data.

Radio News Salaries - 2003

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$32,900	\$31,000	\$11,000	\$70,000
News Anchor	29,700	29,500	11,000	55,000
News Reporter	22,500	23,000	6,500	40,000
News Producer	22,800	23,000	11,000	30,000
Sports Anchor	26,800	22,500	10,000	80,000
Sports Reporter	17,400	15,000	11,000	21,000

As with television, radio salaries were down in 2002 versus 2001. With an overall salary drop of 1.6 percent, coupled with inflation of 2.4 percent, real wages in radio news (after accounting for inflation) actually fell 4.0 percent. But the pain wasn't felt uniformly across the board. News directors edged up very slightly, and news reporters and news anchors held about even. News producers and sports anchors dropped. The median—or midpoint—is the best gauge of what people typically make.

Median Radio News Salaries 1998 to 2003

	2003	1998	Percentage Change
News Director	\$31,000	\$25,000	+24.0%
News Anchor	29,500	24,000	+22.9%
News Reporter	23,000	20,000	+15.0%

News Producer	23,000	26,000	-11.5%
Sports Anchor	22,500	24,000*	-6.3%
Sports Reporter	15,000	na	

Even after slippage the last two years, most radio news salaries have gone up noticeably in the last five years. With inflation in the same period at 12.2 percent, there was real wage growth for news directors, news anchors and news reporters. News producers and sports anchors clearly have not kept pace. * 1999

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size - 2003

	Major	Large	Medium	Small
News Director	\$55,000	\$36,000	\$30,000	\$24,000
News Anchor	38,500	30,500	25,000	24,000
News Reporter	33,000	20,000	24,000	20,000
News Producer	30,000	30,000	20,000	17,000
Sports Anchor	62,000	30,000	20,000	18,000
Sports Reporter	30,000	10,000	25,000	10,500

News directors in all market sizes went up—with major markets leading the way. News anchors rose in all market sizes except major—where they stayed the same. Reporter salaries fell in the two largest market sizes but rose in the two smallest. News producers fell across the board and others varied. Major markets are those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are those from 250,000 to 1 million; medium markets are from 50,000 to 250,000; and small markets have fewer than 50,000 listeners.

Median Radio News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size - 2003

	One	Two	Three and More
News Director	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$35,000
News Anchor	*	45,000	28,000
News Reporter	*	20,000	24,000
News Producer	*	*	23,000
Sports Anchor	*	17,000	24,500
Sports Reporter	*	25,000	10,500

As in the past, when radio stations have three or more full-time news staff members, salaries generally go up. * Insufficient data.

Median Radio News Salaries by Ownership - 2003

	Group-Owned	Independent
News Director	\$30,000	\$33,000
News Anchor	29,000	32,000
News Reporter	22,300	25,000
News Producer	26,500	11,000

Sports Anchor	24,000	17,500
Sports Reporter	17,500	11,000

As with every year since we started asking, radio news salaries for the top three positions (news director, news anchor and news reporter) are actually lower at group-owned stations than at independents.

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations News Director Supervises - 2003

	One	Two	Three or more
News Director	\$31,000	\$30,000	\$33,500
News Anchor	26,000	27,000	30,000
News Reporter	25,000	24,000	22,000
News Producer	11,000	*	26,500
Sports Anchor	17,000	22,500	25,000
Sports Reporter	18,000	35,000	12,500

This is the first year that news directors who supervise three or more stations made more money than those who supervise one or two. * Insufficient data.

Contracts

Percentage of TV News People Under Contract and Non-Competes - 2003

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	36.2%	78.6%
Assistant News Director	45.8	84.8
Managing Editor	41.1	81.8
Executive Producer	40.9	86.1
Assignment Editor	25.6	87.5
News Producer	56.0	80.4
News Anchor	84.8	79.2
Weathercaster	82.8	83.2
Sports Anchor	82.1	82.3
News Reporter	69.7	82.9
News Writer	7.7	100.0
News Assistant	10.9	60.0
Sports Reporter	48.2	81.1
Photographer	8.7	66.7
Tape Editor	2.6	100.0
Graphics Specialist	8.1	100.0
Internet Specialist	7.1	100.0

Almost half (49.2 percent) of the people who work in TV news are under contract, and almost all of those have non-compete agreements. That's down one percentage point from a year ago, reversing a steady trend of stations putting more and more people under contract. Note that non-competes are not legal in all states. People on the anchor desk are most likely to have contracts, followed by news reporters, news producers and then sports reporters.

Percentage of Radio News People Under Contract or Non-Compete - 2003

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	17.3%	52.9%
News Anchor	12.8	80.0
News Reporter	9.8	60.0
News Producer	9.1	100.0
Sports Anchor	9.1	100.0
Sports Reporter	5.9	100.0

Unlike television, the vast majority of radio news people are not under contract, although almost all categories rose from a year ago.

Bob Papper is professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Data entry and tabulation were done by the Bureau of Business Research at Ball State. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio Television News Directors Association.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2002 among all 1,421 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,490 radio stations. Valid responses came from 890 television stations (62.6 percent) and 272 radio news directors and general managers representing 445 radio stations.