

Salaries Soar
By Bob Papper

After two down years, the latest RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey found double-digit increases in both television and radio news salaries at the end of 2003. Television news salaries rose 10 percent, and radio news salaries were up 11.8 percent from a year ago. The increases weren't uniform – some positions rose considerably more than others, and certain market sizes fared better than others. But with inflation a low 1.9 percent for the year, real wages in broadcast news recovered all of the losses of the last couple years. Salaries peaked in the fourth quarter of 2000. The latest figures are up 2.2 percent from that all-time high. On the other hand, with inflation at 5.9 percent since 2000, real wages (salary minus inflation) remain below that high water mark.

Television News Salaries - 2004

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$78,900	\$68,000	\$9,000	\$260,000
Assistant News Director	64,000	60,000	22,000	170,000
Managing Editor	59,100	53,000	23,000	133,000
Executive Producer	51,500	46,000	17,000	125,000
Assignment Editor	33,200	32,000	16,000	70,000
News Producer	31,000	28,000	16,000	80,000
News Anchor	72,200	59,500	10,000	400,000
Weathercaster	58,700	50,000	10,000	215,000
Sports Anchor	51,600	40,000	10,000	200,000
News Reporter	33,700	28,000	10,700	125,000
News Writer	29,700	27,000	14,000	80,000
News Assistant	22,700	21,000	5,500	55,000
Sports Reporter	32,600	28,000	16,000	125,000
Photographer	28,900	25,000	10,700	75,000
Tape Editor	26,700	23,000	8,500	70,000
Graphics Specialist	30,200	30,000	13,000	50,000
Internet Specialist	34,800	34,500	7,000	65,000

In television, the salaries for all positions rose -- except news assistant (which fell) and photographers (which remained the same). The biggest jumps went to Internet specialist, graphics specialist and news anchor, with weathercaster and managing editor not far behind. As a group, managing editor fell quite a bit last year, so much of this year's increase made up for last year's drop. There were also strong salary gains for sports anchor and sports reporter. All other groups (except news assistant and photographer) rose 6 to 9 percent. With inflation a low 1.9 percent, most positions experienced noticeable or strong real wage growth.

Five and Ten Year Median Television News Salary Comparisons 2004 to 1999 to 1994

	2004	1999	5-Year Percentage Change	1994	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+12.4%		+23.1%
News Director	\$68,000	\$56,000	+21.4	\$52,800	+28.8
Assistant News Director	60,000	50,000	+20.0	45,000	+33.3

Managing Editor	53,000	47,500	+11.6	42,600	+24.4
Executive Producer	46,000	40,000	+15.0	37,500	+22.7
Assignment Editor	32,000	29,300	+9.2	27,400	+16.8
News Producer	28,000	24,000	+16.7	22,900	+22.3
News Anchor	59,500	44,000	+35.2	54,300	+9.6
Weathercaster	50,000	40,000	+25.0	44,900	+11.4
Sports Anchor	40,000	33,000	+21.2	44,400	-9.9
News Reporter	28,000	24,000	+16.7	24,200	+15.7
News Writer	27,000	24,000	+12.5	NA	NA
News Assistant	21,000	20,000	+5.0	NA	NA
Sports Reporter	28,000	22,000	+27.3	NA	NA
Photographer	25,000	23,000	+8.7	21,600	+15.7
Tape Editor	23,000	22,000	+4.5	NA	NA
Graphics Specialist	30,000	24,000	+25.0	NA	NA
Internet Specialist	34,500	26,000	+32.7	NA	NA

Inflation has grown by 12.4 percent in the last five years and 23.1 percent in the last 10 years. So growth (or loss) in real wages in those periods is the difference between inflation and the change in percentage. For the last five years, most positions rose beyond inflation, led by Internet specialist, news anchor, sports reporter, weathercaster, graphics specialist, news director, sports anchor and assistant news director. Still coming in ahead of inflation: news producer, news reporter and executive producer. News writer came in essentially right at the inflation mark, and the others lost ground: managing editor, assignment editor, photographer, news assistant and tape editor. But some of those numbers don't tell the bigger story: The last decade has seen only modest salary gains. Over the last 10 years, sports anchors are actually down 9.9 percent – the only group to drop over that period. In the last decade, only three positions actually saw growth in real wages: assistant news director, news director and managing editor – all management positions. Executive producer and news producer came close to inflation, but all others actually saw real wages drop.

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size - 2004

	1 – 25	26 – 50	51 – 100	101-150	150+
News Director	\$100,000	\$120,000	\$80,000	\$60,000	\$50,000
Assistant News Director	100,000	75,000	55,000	47,800	35,500
Managing Editor	80,000	60,000	50,000	42,000	32,000
Executive Producer	72,500	62,000	45,000	40,000	29,000
Assignment Editor	42,000	36,500	32,000	28,000	21,000
News Producer	48,000	38,000	28,000	22,000	20,000
News Anchor	115,000	107,500	65,000	47,300	30,000
Weathercaster	88,000	85,500	59,000	42,000	30,000
Sports Anchor	85,000	80,500	46,000	32,000	26,000
News Reporter	52,500	41,300	30,000	23,000	20,000
News Writer	37,000	25,000	20,800	20,000	22,000
News Assistant	34,500	28,000	19,000	16,000	15,000
Sports Reporter	42,000	40,000	28,000	22,000	20,000
Photographer	44,000	34,500	25,500	20,000	19,000
Tape Editor	40,000	27,500	20,000	18,200	17,100
Graphics Specialist	33,000	29,000	30,000	25,500	17,500
Internet Specialist	52,500	43,000	31,000	29,000	24,500

As always, with rare exception, the bigger the market, the bigger the salary. At the same time, salaries for the top 25 markets probably understate top salary levels because some of the biggest stations in that category did not fill out the salary data. Those omissions have little effect overall but will understate market 1-25 data in this table. The table also shows that, in broadcast as well as other areas, it's the rich who tend to get richer. By far, the largest salary growth came in top 25 markets, followed by markets 26 – 50. All other groups were in single digits, with the smallest markets actually having a slightly larger gain than markets 101 – 150, followed by markets 51 – 100.

Median TV News Salaries by Staff Size - 2004

	51+	31-50	21-30	11-20	1-10
News Director	\$126,000	\$75,500	\$57,000	\$49,000	\$39,000
Assistant News Director	76,000	52,500	42,000	38,000	22,000
Managing Editor	65,000	50,000	34,000	33,000	*
Executive Producer	62,000	45,000	40,000	31,500	*
Assignment Editor	40,000	32,500	27,500	23,000	25,000
News Producer	40,000	27,000	21,500	21,000	28,000
News Anchor	110,000	60,000	40,000	30,000	20,000
Weathercaster	89,000	50,000	32,000	30,000	19,800
Sports Anchor	86,500	40,500	30,000	25,000	17,500
News Reporter	45,000	27,000	22,000	20,000	19,500
News Writer	30,000	21,500	18,000	*	*
News Assistant	28,000	18,000	9,000	13,000	22,000
Sports Reporter	40,000	27,000	20,000	20,000	28,000
Photographer	37,000	25,000	21,500	19,500	21,000
Tape Editor	29,000	20,000	16,000	16,600	18,000
Graphics Specialist	32,500	28,000	20,000	17,000	27,500
Internet Specialist	38,500	31,000	24,500	*	*

Note that staff size may be a cleaner determinant of salary than market size; there were extremely few exceptions to the rule that the larger the staff, the higher the salary. Most of the exceptions involved the smallest staff size because that includes both very small staff at small market stations along with big market but small staff independents. Interestingly, despite the strong upward salary trend, almost all the positions at the smallest staff level dropped in salary from a year ago. Most network affiliates showed similar salaries, although Fox stations were a little higher, and PBS stations were a lot lower. Regionally, stations in the Northeast paid the most, followed by the West, South and the Midwest trailing the others – as it has the last several years. *Insufficient data

Radio News Salaries - 2004

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$36,800	\$35,500	\$18,000	\$110,000
News Anchor	30,100	30,000	15,000	45,000
News Reporter	24,200	25,000	2,000	40,000
News Producer	29,400	25,000	18,000	43,000
Sports Anchor	31,000	30,000	18,000	60,000
Sports Reporter	18,600	20,000	10,000	25,000

At an overall 11.8 percent increase, radio news salaries rose even more than television. News director and sports anchor saw the biggest jumps; news anchor was the only group to grow below inflation's modest 1.9 percent.

Five and Ten Year Median Radio News Salary Comparisons 2004 to 1999 to 1994

	2004	1999	5-Year Percentage Change	1994	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+12.4%		+23.1%
News Director	\$35,500	\$25,000	+42.0	\$23,200	+53.0
News Anchor	30,000	23,000	+30.4	23,100	+29.9
News Reporter	25,000	24,000	+4.2	16,400	+52.4
News Producer	25,000	26,000	-3.8	NA	NA
Sports Anchor	30,000	24,000	+25.0	NA	NA
Sports Reporter	20,000	NA	NA	NA	NA

Overall, radio salaries have done well in the last five and ten years – at least for those remaining in the business. News director, news anchor and sports anchor all came in well ahead of inflation over the last five years. News reporters have gained little in that period, and news producers have actually dropped. Over the last decade, all three positions for which we have figures (news director, news reporter and news anchor) increased well above the inflation rate.

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size - 2003

	Major	Large	Medium	Small
News Director	\$51,000	\$41,500	\$32,000	\$25,000
News Anchor	40,000	35,000	25,000	21,500
News Reporter	33,000	24,000	23,000	20,000
News Producer	38,000	20,000	24,000	32,000
Sports Anchor	*	45,000	35,000	21,000
Sports Reporter	*	25,000	15,000	19,000

The biggest overall salary growth came in large and small markets, with medium and major markets lagging well behind. 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. *Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size - 2004

	One	Two	Three and More
News Director	\$30,000	\$26,000	\$40,000
News Anchor	*	32,500	30,000
News Reporter	*	20,000	28,000
News Producer	*	40,000	25,000
Sports Anchor	*	25,000	32,500

Sports Reporter	*	20,000	19,000
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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 - 2004

	Group-Owned	Independent
News Director	\$32,000	\$40,000
News Anchor	26,500	40,000
News Reporter	24,000	26,000
News Producer	25,000	32,000
Sports Anchor	30,000	29,000
Sports Reporter	19,000	20,000

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. This year, only sports anchor deviated from that pattern – and only barely.

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations News Director Supervises - 2004

	One	Two	Three or more
News Director	\$38,000	\$40,000	\$32,000
News Anchor	28,500	38,500	25,000
News Reporter	30,000	24,000	24,000
News Producer	*	32,000	25,000
Sports Anchor	*	38,500	25,000
Sports Reporter	*	20,000	19,000

News directors who supervise one or two stations made more than those who supervise three or more stations. Last year was the one and only time that wasn't the case. Note that salaries are generally higher where there are one or two stations rather than three or more. * Insufficient data

Contracts

Percentage of TV News People Under Contract and Non-Competes - 2004

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	33.0%	81.8%
Assistant News Director	46.6	85.4
Managing Editor	46.8	75.9
Executive Producer	58.1	77.1
Assignment Editor	25.9	81.0
News Producer	61.9	80.5
News Anchor	90.4	85.4
Weathercaster	86.2	85.7
Sports Anchor	84.4	85.5
News Reporter	77.1	86.5
News Writer	2.6	100.0
News Assistant	1.8	66.7

Sports Reporter	56.5	87.5
Photographer	11.0	78.3
Tape Editor	0.9	66.7
Graphics Specialist	8.9	80.0
Internet Specialist	10.0	62.5

The latest numbers return to the general trend of an increasing percentage of news people under contract in television. Last year, the numbers were stable or down slightly. This year, almost all categories are up. The biggest jumps were among on air staff and executive producer. Most people who have contracts have non-compete agreements, but non-competes are not legal in all states.

Percentage of Radio News People Under Contract or Non-Compete - 2004

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	21.1%	55.0%
News Anchor	27.5	36.4
News Reporter	16.7	50.0
News Producer	20.0	66.7
Sports Anchor	13.0	66.7
Sports Reporter	18.2	100.0

Unlike television, the vast majority of radio news people are not under contract, although almost all categories rose noticeably from a year ago. That's the second straight year of across-the-board growth in the use of contracts in radio.

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 2003 among all 1,295 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,482 radio stations. Valid responses came from 838 television stations (64.7 percent) and 133 radio news directors and general managers representing 437 radio stations.