

A bad year for salaries

by Bob Papper

It was a bad year for salaries in both television and radio news, but that's been true for most of the last half decade. After down years during 2001 and 2002, salaries went well up in 2003. But last year, both radio and television salaries came in just ahead of inflation, and, this year, inflation won by a landslide. TV news salaries were virtually unchanged from a year ago—up just two-tenths of a percent. With inflation at 3.4 percent for the year, almost everyone had a loss in real wages--the pay increase minus the devaluation caused by inflation. In this case, real TV news wages fell 3.2 percent. Only managing editors (up 9.1 percent), news anchors (up 5.4 percent) and assistant news directors (up 4.2 percent) beat the inflation rate. Assignment editors and news directors rose 2.7 – 3.1 percent; weathercasters and sports anchors were unchanged, and most of the rest dropped slightly. News reporters, news writers and Internet specialists all dropped between 6.7 and 7.4 percent. Sports reporters fell by 10.7 percent.

Radio was worse. Radio salaries varied more, but overall pay in radio news dropped 4.4 percent from a year ago. That's before inflation. News and sports anchors went up, but news directors, news reporters and sports reporters all dropped.

Television News Salaries - 2006

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$86,000	\$75,000	\$25,000	\$300,000
Assistant News Director	67,500	62,500	30,000	150,000
Managing Editor	63,300	60,000	30,000	125,000
Executive Producer	52,600	49,500	22,000	125,000
News Anchor	75,500	58,500	13,000	1,200,000
Weathercaster	63,600	50,000	10,000	500,000
Sports Anchor	52,900	40,000	5,000	400,000
News Reporter	35,200	28,000	4,000	237,000
Sports Reporter	32,100	25,000	8,000	100,000
Assignment Editor	35,200	33,500	14,000	95,000
News Producer	31,900	29,000	17,000	135,000
News Writer	29,200	25,000	4,000	68,000
News Assistant	26,700	24,500	10,000	50,000
Photographer	29,200	27,000	10,000	80,000
Tape Editor	27,100	24,500	6,000	65,000
Graphics Specialist	30,000	30,800	15,000	60,000
Internet Specialist	36,300	35,000	20,000	100,000
Art Director	51,200	47,500	4,000	120,000

There were few differences in salaries based on network affiliation, although Fox affiliates ran a little higher than the others. News manager median salaries at the four major affiliates were 20-25 percent higher than at other commercial stations, but other positions were more variable, and the differences were smaller. Overall, salaries in the Midwest were about 10 percent lower than the rest of the country.

Five and Ten Year Median Television News Salary Comparisons 2006 to 2001 to 1996

	2006	2001	5-Year Percentage Change	1996	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+13.1%		+28.2%
All TV news			+7.7		+34.2
News Director	\$75,000	\$65,000	+15.4	\$48,000	+56.3
Assistant News Director	62,500	54,500	+14.7	42,000	+48.8
Managing Editor	60,000	50,000	+20.0	43,000	+39.5
Executive Producer	49,500	48,500	+2.1	39,000	+26.9
News Anchor	58,500	47,500	+23.2	43,000	+36.0
Weathercaster	50,000	44,500	+12.4	36,000	+38.9
Sports Anchor	40,000	35,000	+14.3	32,500	+23.1
News Reporter	28,000	26,000	+7.7	23,000	+21.7
Sports Reporter	25,000	24,000	+4.2	21,000	+19.0
Assignment Editor	33,500	30,000	+11.7	28,000	+19.6
News Producer	29,000	26,000	+11.5	22,000	+31.8
News Writer	25,000	29,000	-13.8	*	*
News Assistant	24,500	20,000	+22.5	*	*
Photographer	27,000	24,000	+12.5	20,000	+35.0
Tape Editor	24,500	22,000	+11.4	*	*
Graphics Specialist	30,800	25,000	+23.2	26,500	+16.2
Internet Specialist	35,000	35,000	NC	*	*

This table gives the longer term picture, comparing salaries with five years ago, ten years ago and with inflation over those periods. Overall, in the last five years, TV news salaries have grown at just over half the rate of inflation (7.7 percent versus 13.1 percent). The ten year picture is better, with overall salary growth (34.2 percent) running ahead of inflation (28.2 percent). The big winners in the last five years are managing editor, news anchor, news assistant and graphics specialist – all up between 20.0 and 23.2 percent). News writer, down 13.8 percent, was the biggest loser and the only group to actually drop over the five year period. Over the last 10 years, the biggest winners were news managers—except executive producers—and news anchors and weathercasters. Photographers and producers also rose ahead of inflation. No positions actually dropped in salary of the last 10 years, but graphics specialists, sports

reporters and assignment editors rose the least. In most tables, we use median—or midpoint—salaries as the best general indicator of pay level. *Insufficient data.

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size – 2006

	1 – 25	26 – 50	51 – 100	101-150	150+
News Director	\$120,000	\$130,000	\$80,000	\$65,000	\$53,000
Assistant News Director	110,000	80,000	55,000	47,000	36,500
Managing Editor	80,800	60,000	49,000	45,000	41,500
Executive Producer	71,300	62,400	45,000	36,500	30,000
News Anchor	115,000	107,500	67,500	45,000	30,500
Weathercaster	108,000	90,000	59,000	41,300	30,000
Sports Anchor	89,800	80,000	45,000	33,000	26,000
News Reporter	51,000	43,500	30,000	23,000	20,000
Sports Reporter	62,500	38,000	30,000	22,000	20,000
Assignment Editor	40,000	35,000	34,000	30,000	25,300
News Producer	45,000	37,000	29,800	23,300	21,500
News Writer	35,500	25,000	22,000	18,000	*
News Assistant	31,800	36,000	21,000	16,800	15,000
Photographer	44,000	35,000	28,000	21,000	21,000
Tape Editor	38,800	28,000	22,300	19,300	23,000
Graphics Specialist	40,000	34,500	25,000	27,000	30,800
Internet Specialist	47,000	40,000	36,300	25,000	35,000
Art Director	56,500	45,000	35,000	*	*

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the salary. There are exceptions, of course, and the most common ones are in the largest markets. That's because the biggest markets include both the biggest and highest-paying stations—along with a disproportionately high number of smaller, lower-paying independents. Compared to last year, markets 1-25 and 101-150 saw the most positions increase in salary. All the rest were about the same. *Insufficient data.

Median TV News Salaries by Staff Size –2006

	51+	31-50	21-30	11-20	1-10
News Director	\$121,000	\$85,000	\$65,000	\$53,000	\$45,000
Assistant News Director	80,000	55,000	36,500	30,000	48,000
Managing Editor	70,000	47,000	54,500	37,500	44,000
Executive Producer	65,000	45,000	34,500	32,000	44,000
News Anchor	110,000	70,000	45,000	31,000	44,000
Weathercaster	100,000	55,000	44,500	30,000	32,500
Sports Anchor	82,500	45,000	33,000	25,500	25,000
News Reporter	45,000	30,000	24,900	20,000	23,500
Sports Reporter	40,000	28,000	21,800	19,500	24,300
Assignment Editor	40,000	35,000	30,000	24,000	30,000
News Producer	39,500	30,000	24,000	21,000	28,500
News Writer	25,000	20,000	*	15,000	* -*
News Assistant	35,000	20,000	17,000	18,000	28,000
Photographer	37,200	28,700	22,400	20,000	25,000
Tape Editor	30,000	23,000	20,000	20,000	17,000
Graphics Specialist	35,000	26,000	25,000	18,500	11,000
Internet Specialist	45,000	30,000	22,500	22,000	35,000
Art Director	53,000	35,000	*	33,000	40,000

In contrast to market size, there are extremely few exceptions to the pattern that the stations with the largest news staffs pay the most money. Here, the exceptions are most likely to be among the smallest newsrooms because that's where we find a disproportionately high percentage of small size but large market independents. This year, the smallest news departments had the most positions go up in salary.

*Insufficient data.

Radio News Salaries – 2006

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$31,900	\$30,000	\$8,000	\$100,000
News Reporter	22,200	25,000	4,000	50,000
News Anchor	28,300	23,500	5,000	120,000
News Producer	21,900	20,500	6,000	75,000
Sports Anchor	34,800	32,500	4,000	100,000
Sports Reporter	18,500	19,000	1,000	40,000
Other	21,000	16,400	5,000	45,000

As usual, the trend in radio salaries varied from position to position, with news reporters edging up and the relatively few sports anchors increasing more. Sports reporters, news producers and news directors all went down from a year ago. Overall, radio salaries fell 4.4 percent. Tack on an inflation rate of 3.4 percent and real wages in radio news dropped 7.8 percent in the last year.

Five and Ten Year Median Radio News Salary Comparisons 2006 to 2001 to 1996

	2006	2001	5-Year Percentage Change	1996	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+13.1%		+28.2%
All radio news			-4.5%		+22.2%
News Director	\$30,000	\$31,000	-3.2	\$21,000	+42.9
News Reporter	25,000	25,750	-2.9	19,000	+31.6
News Anchor	23,500	25,000	-6.0	21,000	+11.9
News Producer	20,500	26,000	-21.2	20,000	+2.5
Sports Anchor	32,500	30,000	+8.3	*	*
Sports Reporter	19,000	*	*	*	*

Overall, salaries in radio news have not kept pace with inflation over the last five or ten years. This year's losses wiped out all the gains over the last five years, but, even so, wages were running well behind inflation. Only sports anchors are up over the last five years, and they're up just 8.3 percent—still behind inflation. The picture is more complex over the past 10 years. News directors are still up well beyond inflation (42.9 percent versus 28.2 percent), and news reporters are up a little above inflation (at 31.6 percent), but both news anchors and news producers are running well behind the inflation rate. *Insufficient data.

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size – 2006

	Major	Large	Medium	Small
News Director	\$35,000	\$44,000	\$30,000	\$25,000
News Reporter	42,500	25,500	11,000	24,000
News Anchor	83,500	23,000	32,000	22,800
News Producer	40,000	29,500	21,800	20,000
Sports Anchor	100,000	40,000	30,000	25,000
Sports Reporter	*	30,000	4,000	19,000

As usual, the larger the market, generally, the higher the salary. There's a fair amount of variability because some of the specialized positions only appear in certain size markets or at certain stations. More positions rose in major and small markets than the two middle groups, but the differences were small. 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 - 2006

	One	Two	Three or 4	5 or more
News Director	\$26,000	\$30,500	\$26,000	\$37,000
News Reporter	*	*	17,800	25,000
News Anchor	*	*	22,500	30,000
News Producer	20,000	21,300	20,000	22,300
Sports Anchor	40,000	35,000	24,000	40,000
Sports Reporter	25,000	40,000	11,000	19,000

The salaries by staff size are highly variable until we get to five or more employees— at which point all the salaries are higher except for sports reporters. That was the same pattern as last year. We, too, were puzzled by stations with one news staff member who’s a sports reporter, sports anchor or news producer. *Insufficient data.

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations News Director Supervises - 2006

	One	2-3 -Two	Four -Three or more	5-6	7 or more
News Director	\$35,000	\$26,000	\$35,000	\$32,000	\$33,000
News Reporter	*	4,000	26,000	24,000	27,800
News Anchor	*	16,600	38,000	23,500	30,000
News Producer	*	22,500	13,500	23,500	20,000
Sports Anchor	*	35,000	70,000	24,000	37,500
Sports Reporter	*	4,000	16,500	*	30,000

As with last year, there is no consistent pattern to salaries based on the number of stations a news director supervises. *Insufficient data.

Median Radio News Salaries by Ownership - 2006

	Group-Owned	Independent
News Director	\$30,000	\$30,000
News Reporter	25,000	18,500
News Anchor	23,300	27,000
News Producer	20,000	28,000
Sports Anchor	35,000	24,000
Sports Reporter	22,500	10,500

As with last year, there is no consistent pattern to salaries based on ownership. *Insufficient data.

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 2005 among all 1,617 operating, non-satellite television stations. Calls are still being made to all U.S. radio stations, with surveys sent to all radio news directors—in addition to a random sample of 1,200 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,120 television stations (69.3 percent) and, so far, 155 radio news directors and general managers representing 524 radio stations.

Contracts

Percentage of TV News People Under Contract and Non-Competes - 2005

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	39.8%	80.2%
Assistant News Director	43.1	81.8
Managing Editor	50.0	87.5
Executive Producer	55.5	93.4
News Anchor	92.1	83.7
Weathercaster	89.6	84.1
Sports Anchor	88.2	84.0
News Reporter	79.7	86.7
Sports Reporter	67.6	88.4
Assignment Editor	32.0	88.9
News Producer	56.9	83.6
News Writer	18.8	50.0
News Assistant	7.9	60.0
Photographer	14.2	88.9
Tape Editor	10.9	84.6
Graphics Specialist	6.7	66.7
Internet Specialist	27.1	89.5
Art Director	17.9	80.0

Almost all the percentages for contracts in TV news are up—with bigger jumps for managing editor, assignment editor, news writer, Internet specialist and news and sports reporters. Most employees who are under contract have non-competes—except in the growing number of states where non-competes have been eliminated.

Percentage of Radio News People Under Contract or Non-Compete – 2006 -2005

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	34.8%	74.4%
News Reporter	30.0	66.7
News Anchor	30.0	83.3
News Producer	25.0	90.0
Sports Anchor	33.3	100.0
Sports Reporter	50.0	83.3

The differences this year versus last year are variable, but for the third straight year, there is an overall increase in the percentage of radio news people under contract. As with TV non-competes, most contracts include that provision unless the state prohibits it.

TV news 2006 starting salaries for new employees with no fulltime experience

Position	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
All TV news	\$21,400	\$20,000	\$7,000	\$77,000
Reporter	21,100	20,000	8,500	77,000
Producer	21,800	21,000	9,500	37,500
Photographer	20,600	20,000	8,000	44,500
Tape editor	20,500	20,600	7,000	37,500
Assignment editor	26,300	25,000	19,300	35,000
News assistant	23,000	23,700	16,600	31,200
Writer	24,400	25,000	18,000	30,000
Anchor	20,600	19,800	13,000	29,600

The positions are listed in order of how many starting hires were made in 2006.

Radio news 2006 starting salaries for new employees with no fulltime experience

Position	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
All radio news	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$1,000	\$32,000
Reporter	19,400	19,500	10,000	30,000
Announcer	17,000	16,000	1,000	32,000
Producer	16,400	14,800	10,700	29,000
Board operator	13,600	13,800	10,700	16,000
Anchor	20,600	22,000	10,700	30,000

The positions are listed in order of how many starting hires were made in 2006.

Pay on the TV Anchor Desk

Over the last 10 years, there's been there's been a decided change in the salary relationship among the news, sports and weather anchors. The order hasn't changed; news anchors were always first with weather second and sports third. But the spread has changed.

The pivotal turning point appears to be 2000-2001. In the five years ending in 2000, news anchors made an average of 16.5 percent more than weathercasters and 31.9 percent more than sports anchors. Weather outpaced sports by 16.4 percent.

In the five years since, the difference between news and weather has grown to 24.7 percent, and the difference between news and sports has moved up to 40.7 percent. Weather now outpaces sports by 24.9 percent.

But this comparison probably understates the difference between weather and sports. Over the last 10 years, far more weathercasters than sports anchors have been added to news departments as stations expanded weather teams and hired weather people—but commonly not sports people—for new shows. Even with the additional secondary weathercasters, they've widened the salary gap over sports.