

By Bob Papper and Michael Gerhard

Overall, the 1999-2000 RTNDA/Ball State University Survey finds television news and staff continuing modest to strong growth ... but radio news and staff stagnant or slipping.

Television

In television, most stations (83 percent) reported that their staff stayed the same or increased, but the rate of increase continues to slow. Forty-four percent went up this year—steadily down from 63 percent five years ago.

Almost all TV stations (97 percent) reported running the same or more news this past year as the year before; half the stations say they expect to run more news this election year.

The increases in news and staff don't show up in some statistics because there are more stations than ever are running local news, and start-ups tend to be smaller and air less news. This year's survey found 802 TV stations with local news—up about 50 from five years ago.

Radio

Radio news staffing is not much changed over the last five years but has edged down to its lowest level in that time. Almost two-thirds of all radio news operations report they stayed the same in amount of news this past year compared to the year before, and over three-quarters say that will continue this year.

But even as radio news directors report that they're running about the same amount of news as before, the numbers don't back that up. When we asked radio news directors how many minutes of news they run by day part, we find a significant drop in the last two years: from 56 minutes of news per weekday two years ago to 42 minutes per weekday in the latest survey.

Radio news directors continue to take on more responsibilities. Last year's survey found almost two-thirds of radio news directors also handling non-news responsibilities. In this year's survey, more than three-quarters of the radio news directors say they're also wearing non-news hats on the job.

Handling the Web

On the broadcast side, there's a direct correlation between the size of the staff and the amount of news a station runs. That appears to be less true for news on the Web.

"I just think too many times, people think in terms, 'We're in the radio business,'" says Hinrikus. "And then TV people think, 'We're in the TV business,' and newspaper people think, 'We're in the newspaper business.' I think we're in the information/entertainment business. And how we provide it to them are opportunities we can go after."

Hinrikus takes an all-out approach. With virtually no additional staff, he's redirected station effort to making their Web site a serious competitor to the local newspaper—with Web

revenues rapidly approaching one of their own radio stations. “The original intent,” says Hinrikus, is that “whatever is in the newspaper, we wanted to put it on the Internet.” Classified, help wanted, real estate, community calendar, wedding announcements, auctions, “You name it, it’s there,” says Picking.

Only 2 percent of all radio station news directors and 11 percent of all TV station news directors report making a profit on their Web site.

The latest figures from the RTNDA/Ball State University Survey show 63 percent of radio stations have a Web site; XX percent of television stations have a Web site. In television, almost two-thirds of all stations report they supply content to their Web site. That’s up from just over half the TV stations the year before. The typical TV news department has one full time person handling Internet responsibilities—regardless of market size or size of news department.

“The level of content depends less on station size, and less even on staffing than on what I would call commitment to the Internet,” says Haller. “From where I sit, the attitude is much, much more important than the resource issue.”

“The more commitment, the more employees, the larger the revenue,” says Zagorski. “And it has less to do with market size than commitment to the Web. Stations, can promote, promote, promote, but you’ve got to give them great content; you’ve got to give them a reason to come back.”

WBZ in Boston operates one of the few combined radio/television Web sites we could find. But that’s going to change. “There are completely different ideas [in radio and television],” says Stephanie Miller, WBZ webmaster. “So in the future we’re looking to separate them.”

“We have some people who are absolutely 100 percent on board,” notes Miller, “and then we have some people who are just really hesitant because they’re not sure of the time commitment and the money commitment to get what? Because it’s such a new enterprise that it’s really unknown what your return will truly be.”

“You want people to tune in for ratings,” says Tim Lyon, news director and webmaster at WJON radio in St. Cloud, MN. “So, do you give away the store on the Web? We just decided about a year ago that it doesn’t matter where they get the information, as long as they get the information from us.”

It’s clear from calls all over the country that both radio and television stations are struggling with different models for dealing with the Web. Staffing is likely to be determined by which one of three basic, structural models stations choose to follow.

Let the Network Do It

Deferring to the network was a quick and easy way for many television stations to get into the Internet business. The network supplies national and international news, sports, and even links to weather. Local stations can run as much or as little as they wish.

“We talk to everybody from people who have two or three web producers and are doing their own thing to people who barely have a part time web producer, if you can even call them that, operating these sites,” says Uli Haller, Manager of the Local Affiliate Program for

MSNBC.com.

By the time this article is printed, MSNBC should have about 100 NBC stations signed up—along with some newspapers in markets where the NBC affiliate wasn't interested.

The up side: As in network affiliation, there's a national brand people know, and it's possible to handle the Web site with little effort and little staffing.

The down side: Potentially little local identification, and critics argue the network Web sites are better at drawing page views to the network than sending people to local content and local Web site.

Let Someone Do It For You

By the time this is published, Internet Business Systems in Minneapolis should be running 42 station partnerships. Stations supply the brand name, access to content, and space in the building. IBS hires and trains the staff, builds the site, sells it, and maintains it.

According to president and founder Reid Johnson, IBS hires four or five content people and four to five sales people. Along with eight to ten people on site, IBS supplies software and technical support from headquarters.

IBS also supplies content, including national and international news, sports, health, business, and technology information. They even produce some material to run both on the air and on the Web.

"The model is a network," says Johnson. "The only thing that's different between our network and the old networks is that when we sell things nationally, all of the national revenue goes back to the sites. It doesn't get held back at IBS. There's no IBS-dot-com site. It's all these local sites."

The up side: Professionally done, top to bottom, no muss, no fuss, and comparatively large staffs NOT on the station payroll.

The down side: You have an equal partner with a say in the product who also gets half the revenue.

Let's Do It Ourselves

This version comes in two variations:

Let's Do It Ourselves ... with help

That means hiring a company who may set it all up or work with the station to do it, supplying a software template and, perhaps, hosting the server and supplying tech support and even some content. WorldNow in New York City is probably the biggest of the group, with 130 non-exclusive client stations. Mark Zagorski, vice president of marketing and development, says WorldNow provides clients with a tool set and training to allow anyone to put content, graphics, and video on the Web.

"We look at everyone being part of the Internet staff," says Zagorski. "We have stations

that run their sites with one part time person and put up tons of content. We think the key group size is anywhere from three to four people, and that includes a sales staff. A lot of our sites that are doing some significant revenue are putting a sales staff of two people down, a web producer and then usually a junior producer to work with that web producer to take stories from on air and put them on line.”

The up side: You determine what you want to do, execution is made simple enough for non-experts to handle, strong tech support.

The down side: Ongoing costs for that support and software, and you have to pay and support the staff to supply content and sell advertising.

Let's Just Do It All Ourselves

For the serious do-it-yourselfer, this is taking on all the responsibilities either within the station or a mixture of within the station and within the corporation—possibly with some outside consultants or hired help.

On the TV side, WRAL-TV in Raleigh-Durham, NC, has been one of the pioneers.

They have three and a half full time content producers, grabbing text, still images, audio, graphics, streaming, updating pages, providing searchable streaming video, and segmenting newscasts to break up newscasts and stories. Then there are three programmers and system administrators to handle the technical work, and a full time on line sales person. John Conway, who oversees the site, says they also get the equivalent of one full time graphics person from the promotion department.

“We don't update our site once or twice a day,” says Conway. “We've got it staffed from 7 in the morning 'til midnight. So when news happens, it's out there, and people are consuming it in that way.”

“There's a tremendous learning curve,” says Picking, “and there were days when I absolutely hated it when we first got started. But once you get a routine down, it may take an extra 15 minutes in a day to update the page.”

The up side: It's all yours.

The down side: It's all yours.

Staffing and Content

Picking has four people in news (including him), and they take care of six stations and the Web site. In fact, the three stations in Abilene now get their news from the Web site. “It saves on faxing,” says Picking.

As the Web site has grown, so has the staff. For the first two years, the regular staff handled the site. Now the station has someone full time handling what they call “display ads”—not “banner ads.” The receptionist helps with obits, dj's work on the Web site when they're babysitting the board for syndicated shows. The station is now planning to hire someone full time in sales.

Lyon has three people in news (including him) plus one in sports. They handle three stations and the Web. Lyon remembers the learning curve as steep and painful. Now, he says

the group probably spends about an hour and a half a day updating the site, and his reporters carry digital cameras with them so their site will include pictures.”

Trish LaMonte is the Online Managing Editor and Internet Reporter for WTVH-TV in Syracuse, NY. She’s one of three full time staffers. There’s also an Internet sales person and a webmaster, although he works for Granite Broadcasting in Buffalo and handles the Buffalo station, too.

LaMonte handles all the content for the Web site, and she says she almost never just takes material from other reporters and puts it on the Web. “We’re writing material more for the eye than the ear,” says LaMonte, “so in most cases, it needs some reworking because I’m writing more in newspaper style. More condensed than newspaper, but it’s not broadcast style either.”

“Everybody plays a role in the Web site,” says Jeff Henderson, news director at WLW Radio in Cincinnati, OH. That’s 13 people in the newsroom and about 25 people all told. A webmaster is the only full time employee for the Web site. “If you go out and do a local story, you come in, cut it up for the air, and you put it on the Web site,” says Henderson.

Even moving video is in the plan. “[Clear Channel] calls it our additional radio station,” says Henderson.

Kevin Daly, the Web Site Supervisor at KXAN-TV in Austin, TX, has two dedicated news producers who cover content updating from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and a fully dedicated Internet sales person. Several people also “chip in here and there.”

At WBZ, Miller is the only content person full time for the Web site. She works on layout, links, adding graphics, and making sure everything is up to date. All told, about “10 to 20 participate in some part time function,” and interns play a key role. She says most of the news comes from radio “because radio is more interested.”

The Future

“I don’t see a day when it will be bigger than TV,” says Johnson, but in the near term, I can see a day where we will be a contributor much like a strong radio station in a market.”

That day has already arrived in Salina, KS.

“Yes we are [making money on the Web],” says Jerry Hinrikus, general manager of KSAL and five other radio stations in Salina and Abilene, KS (www.ebclink.com). “We’re selling it very aggressively. Our goal is to be generating \$20,000 to \$30,000 a month off our web site. We’re treating it like it’s just another radio station that we put on the air.” In fact, Hinrikus says the Web site is “getting very close” to outbidding at least one of their radio stations.

There will also be casualties.

“I’ve already lost a reporter to a Web company,” says Henderson. “More money, West Coast, Silicon Valley, gone. I had somebody here for 20 years, and all of a sudden, there’s such demand for those kind of people, and this guy’s been on the information stream for 20 years, just doing news and writing. So I guess these companies are screaming for people who can supply content. That’s a threat here.”

“One of the things we provide content for is radio,” says Lyon. “Another one we do is Web. Who knows what it will be next week. And as long as you’ve got content, there are all kinds of different ways that you can get that content out. Hopefully make some money, but it’s

not just cuts and sound bites any more. It's exciting. It's a whole different world."

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About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 1999 among all 1,349 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,045 radio stations. Valid responses came from 773 television stations (57.3 percent) and 295 radio news directors and general managers representing 602 radio stations.

SIDEBARS:

www.wjon.com

- WJON Radio, St. Cloud, MN
- runs local news, frequently with sound
- streams the most recent newscast
- streams the station audio
- includes still pictures
- about 22,000 page views a month in their market of about 100,000 people.

www.worldnow.com

Searching for station opportunities, WorldNow recently had Frank N. Magid Associates conduct a survey on the best TV, newspaper, and city web sites. Of 38 TV web sites, the survey found that the average site had 606,000 monthly page views, employed an average 1.32 full time and 2.61 part time content employees and 1.34 full time and 2.58 part time sales employees, and took in \$50,000 to \$100,000 in revenue per year. Generally, the bigger the market, the more page views and revenue, but content and sales employees varied more. Compared to newspapers and city sites, TV web sites paled. The survey found that the 19 newspaper sites they looked at averaged nearly 4 million page views a month, had four times as many full time content employees and nearly four times as many full time sales people. Newspaper sites also took in four to six times the revenue. City sites did even better

www.ebclink.com

- KSAL and two more radio stations in Salina, KS and the company's three stations in Abilene, KS.
- operates like a newspaper with news, weather, sports, classified, real estate, obits, etc.
- local news and lots of sound
- streams the most recent newscast
- streams the station audio

www.wral.com

- WRAL-TV in Raleigh-Durham, NC
- streams video clips
- streams latest newscast
- streams live newscast
- runs about 8 million page views a month ... but has hit 8 million in a week
- about 250,000 unique visitors a month
- Conway says local weather is the primary driving force, then local news and traffic.

www.wtvh.com

- WTVH-TV in Syracuse, NY
- streams newscasts
- streams live newscast

www.700wlw.com

- WLW Radio in Cincinnati, OH
- streams the station audio
- 3,000 to 15,000 page views a day

www.kxan.com

- KXAN-TV in Austin, TX
- four people full time: supervisor, 2 news producers, sales person ... plus several others help
- streaming video
- 1 to 2 million page views per month
- Daly says weather really drives the audience for the Web site

www.wbz.com

- two people full time: webmaster oversees content, manager/salesperson plus 10-20 participate part time and interns help
- combined radio and TV site ... but will split apart
- estimated 400,000 to 500,000 page views per month

www.ibsys.com

- Internet Broadcasting Systems in Minneapolis, MN
- operates websites for 42 stations
- typically sets up eight to ten people at each location—half content, half sales ... technical and design support in Minneapolis
- The Washington Post Company and Hearst-Argyle now hold equity positions in IBS
- the Minneapolis site for WCCO did 11 million page views in May
- Johnson says 33 percent of the traffic is news, 33 percent of the traffic is weather, and 33 percent of the traffic is everything else—except in markets like Los Angeles where weather is not as variable

www.msnbc.com

- Haller says the typical MSNBC affiliate gets about 3 percent of the market audience in page views per month, but that some of their affiliates get six or seven times that many.

News & Staff: 1999-2000

Percentage of TV News Departments Providing Content to Other Media

	Another Local TV Station	Station Web Site	Cable TV Channel	Local Radio Station
All TV	14%	62%	16%	35%
Markets 1-25	24	54	24	19
Markets 26-50	15	58	19	23
Markets 51-100	19	65	21	44
Markets 101-150	7	65	5	44

Markets 151+	7	61	15	33
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Compared to a year ago, this past year found TV stations more likely to provide content to another local station (up from 8 percent) or the station Web site (up from 52 percent) ... less likely to provide content to a radio station (down from 41 percent) ... and unchanged in providing content to a cable channel.

Size of TV News Staff: 1999 vs. 1998

Increased	44%
Stayed the same	39%
Decreased	17%

Although the decrease is small, it's the fifth year in a row that the percentage of stations increasing staff has fallen. Last year, 46 percent had increased staff ... five years ago, the figure was 63 percent. On the other hand, the percentage of stations reporting a decrease has leveled off, down a hair from last year's 18 percent. Fox affiliates, generally with smaller news departments, were more likely to grow than others. The largest news departments (51+) were less likely to grow than all the other categories.

Amount of TV News: 1999 vs. 1998

Stayed the same	49%
Increased	48%
Decreased	3%

The percentage of stations increasing news is up from a year ago (from 42 percent), and the percentage of stations decreasing news is down (from 8 percent), but, overall, the pattern of a fairly even split between stayed the same and increased—with decrease down in single digits—has been true for the last five years. There's no consistent pattern based on market size, but the largest newsrooms (51+) were less likely to increase than others. The volume leader this year ran 8.8 hours of news each weekday (up from 8 a year ago) but 5.5 hours each Saturday and Sunday (down from 6 last year).

Amount of TV News Planned:

Stay the same	43%
Increase	50%
Decrease	1%
Don't Know	6%

The pattern here is similar to the last five years, but the percentage of stations planning to increase news is up from 39 percent a year ago. There's no consistent pattern based on market size, but the largest newsrooms (51+) are less likely to increase than others.

Hours of Local TV News Per Day

	Weekday Median	Saturday Median	Sunday Median
All stations	2.89	1.2	1.01
Markets 1-25	3.69	1.71	1.56
Markets 26-50	3.37	1.69	1.69
Markets 51-100	2.87	1.06	0.89
Markets 101-150	2.83	0.96	0.83
Markets 151+	2.22	0.68	0.62
Staff 51+	5.02	2.59	2.31
Staff 31-50	3.21	1.23	1.08
Staff 21-30	2.84	1.03	0.91
Staff 11-20	2.39	0.72	0.61
Staff 1-10	1.81	0.58	0.64
Independents	1.65	0.47	0.43
Four Network Affiliates	3.12	1.27	1.14
ABC affiliates	3.33	1.25	1.27
CBS affiliates	3.55	1.43	1.18
Fox affiliates	1.89	0.60	0.69
NBC affiliates	3.45	1.55	1.26

The typical numbers of hours of news is similar to last year and the year before. That's because even though stations increase the amount of news that they're doing, more stations are running news. In the last three years, 38 stations have added news departments—half of them Fox

affiliates. But because most start-ups tend to be smaller and run less news, they can end up lowering the median number of hours of news. That may also account for a small slippage from a year ago in the median number of hours on Saturday and Sunday.

TV Staff Size

	Average Full Time	Average Part Time	Average Total Staff
All television	30.1	4.4	34.5
Independents	18.7	5.5	24.2
Four network affiliates	32.7	4.4	37.1
Markets 1-25	54.3	6.7	61
Markets 26-50	44.7	4.1	48.8
Markets 51-100	31.8	4.6	36.4
Markets 101-150	23.4	3.9	27.3
Markets 151+	15.3	3.4	18.7

The average number of news employees has actually dropped from a year ago (to just about what it was two years ago). In fact, all market sizes increased—except the largest (1-25), which dropped substantially (from last year’s average full time of 67 to this year’s 54.3). But that’s deceptive. New news operations—typically smaller start-ups in the biggest markets—have brought the average down. In the top 25 markets, the average network affiliate had 74.8 full time employees and 7.8 part-timers. That’s about double the average independent in the same size market. The largest TV newsroom in the survey had 154 people—up from 138 the year before.

Radio Staff Size

	Average Full Time	Average Part Time	Average Total Staff
All stations	1.8	0.8	2.6
Major Market	4.5	1.9	6.4
Large Market	1.8	1.0	2.8
Medium Market	1.3	0.7	2.0

Small Market	1.1	0.5	1.6
AM only	2.7	1.1	3.8
FM only	1.2	0.6	1.8
Single station	2.5	1.3	3.8
Two stations	1.4	0.3	1.7
Three stations	2.4	0.5	2.9
Four stations	2.0	0.7	2.7
Five or more stations	1.9	1.7	3.6

Other than (AM) major market stations, radio news staffing generally dropped slightly from last year—which was similar to the previous few years. Although the overall drop in full time is just from 2.0 to 1.8 (and part time from 1.0 to 0.8), the latest figures represent the lowest level of radio news staffing in the last decade. The largest radio news operation in the survey had 35 people full time and 15 part time for a total of 50. Major markets were defined as those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

Number of stations managed by news director

one	53%
two	24%
three	12%
four	8%
five or more	3%

Size of Radio News Staff: 1999 vs. 1998

Stayed the same	77%
Increased	17%
Decreased	5%
Don't Know	1%

The numbers for radio staffing are similar to the numbers for the last five years, although there

has been a steady rise in the percentage of stations reporting that staffing has stayed the same. Major market stations were more likely to increase staff than the others.

Amount of Radio News: 1999 vs. 1998

Stayed the same	61%
Increased	31%
Decreased	6%
Don't Know	2%

Amount of Radio News Planned: 1999 vs. 1998

Stay the same	76%
Increase	18%
Decrease	3%
Don't Know	3%

The amount of radio news reported in the most recent survey is almost identical to last year's numbers. The amount of radio news planned is similar, although, over the last three years, there's been a steady increase in the percentage of stations saying they expect the amount of news to stay the same and a very small decrease in the percentage of stations expecting to increase news in the following year.

Group operation (two or more stations in a market) with central newsroom

All stations	78%
Major Market	51%
Large Market	68%
Medium Market	81%
Small Market	90%

These figures are unchanged from a year ago.

Radio News Directors with Other station Roles

All news directors	78%
Major Market	58%

Large Market 76%
 Medium Market 79%
 Small Market 85%

A year ago, 64 percent of radio news directors reported taking on non-news roles at their station. This year's figure is 14 percent higher. The list of other jobs and responsibilities reported this year incorporates a wider range, too.

What Else Radio News Directors Do

Announcing 30%
 Programming 15%
 Public Affairs 15%
 General Manager 8%
 Sales 7%
 Operations 5%
 Sports 5%
 Farm Editor 1%
 Other 14%

News Directors On Line

	TV News Directors	Radio News Directors
e-mail at the office	96%	68%
e-mail at home	73	57
Web at the office	93	71
Web at home	71	54
Internet mail lists at work	41	25
Internet mail lists at home	23	18

Average Minutes of Locally Produced Radio News

	All Radio	Major	Large Market	Medium	Small Market

		Market		Market	
Weekdays:					
AM Drive	22	29	23	21	20
Midday	9	20	8	6	9
PM Drive	9	19	9	6	11
Night	2	3	5	2	2
Total Weekday	42	71	45	35	42
Saturday:					
AM Drive	7	16	6	6	7
Midday	4	11	3	2	5
PM Drive	2	6	2	1	2
Night	2	3	4	<1	<1
Total Saturday	15	36	15	9	14
Sunday:					
AM Drive	3	11	2	2	3
Midday	3	12	1	1	3
PM Drive	2	6	1	<1	1
Night	1	4	4	<1	<1
Total Sunday	9	33	8	3	7

Radio news directors may say that the amount of news they run is about the same, but when they fill out the survey on exactly how many minutes of news they run, the numbers themselves don't back up their perceptions. The amount of news on radio is down from two years ago (the last time we asked this question in this depth)—overall and in almost every category for almost every size market. The biggest drop is during the week, when total radio news dropped from 56 minutes a day two years ago to 42 minutes in this survey. A decrease in news in morning drive accounts for almost half the drop with most of the rest spread across afternoon drive and midday.

When Local TV News Runs

	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
5 a.m.	17%	<1%	<1%
5:30 a.m.	38%	<1%	<1%
6 a.m.	60%	5%	3%
6:30 a.m.	58%	6%	4%
7 a.m.	18%	9%	5%
7:30 a.m.	14%	8%	6%
8 a.m.	7%	8%	4%
8:30 a.m.	7%	8%	4%
12 noon	45%	3%	3%
5 p.m.	50%	12%	15%
5:30 p.m.	24%	4%	12%
6 p.m.	65%	48%	25%
6:30 p.m.	8%	3%	4%
7 p.m.	<1%	0	1%
9 p.m.	6%	4%	5%
10 p.m.	58%	52%	51%
10:30 p.m.	8%	2%	7%
11 p.m.	32%	28%	30%

We last asked this question three years ago, and the biggest changes since have come in the morning—with 5:30 am (up from 21 percent), 5 am (up from 5 percent), and 6 am (up from 54 percent) leading the way. The percentage of stations doing a noon news has actually dropped (from 51 percent three years ago). There have also been decreases at 6 pm and 6:30 pm, but this could simply reflect an increased number of Fox and independent stations who tend to counter-program news. The percentage of stations reporting weekend morning news is up only very slightly from three years ago.

