

Solid Growth in News and Staff

by Bob Papper

The latest RTNDA/Ball State University Survey shows continuing growth in television news in both news and staff – but drops in both categories for radio news.

Full time local TV news employment rose another 4 percent this past year, putting employment at its second highest level ever – 8.6 percent below the peak recorded in the fourth quarter of 2000.

While staffing in TV news is just short of its all-time high, the amount of TV news rose to its highest level ever, averaging 3.7 hours of news per weekday for all TV stations.

The total number of local TV stations running news rose again from 751 last year to 759 this year. Another 68 stations get local news from one of those 759.

Radio, on the other hand, dropped in both news and staff for all size stations and markets. While radio consolidation makes it almost impossible to compare numbers over time, almost 95 percent (94.9 percent) of radio news departments handle the news for more than one station. More than six in ten of those news departments (61 percent) involve a news staff of one.

TV Staff Size – 2004

	Avg full-time	Median full-time	Maximum full-time	Avg part-time	Median part-time	Maximum part-time	Avg total staff	Median total	Maximum total staff
All TV	33.8	30.0	115	4.8	3.0	85	38.6	34.0	140
Big four affiliates	35.6	31.0	115	4.5	3.0	85	40.1	35.5	140
Other commercial	28.6	18.5	100	3.7	4.0	15	32.3	23.0	100
Market size:									
1-25	51.1	55.0	115	5.3	3.0	40	56.4	59.0	140
26-50	52.8	56.5	102	6.3	5.0	21	59.1	62.0	117
51-100	37.1	40.0	100	5.3	3.0	70	42.4	44.0	100
101-150	23.3	22.5	47	4.5	2.0	85	27.8	28.5	99
151+	17.9	18.0	40	4.8	3.0	15	20.9	20.0	40

The overall, full time staff rose 4 percent for the second year in a row – largely recovering from a substantial drop reported in 2001. The jump in part timers was 17.1 percent – raising the total staff by 5.5 percent. But the nature of the staff growth varied by market size. The top 100 markets added full time staff, while smaller markets tended to add more part time staff. Fox newsrooms tend to be smaller than other network affiliates but not by much; “other commercial” stations tend to be noticeably smaller. The biggest newsrooms tended to be in the Northeast, followed by the South, although the largest newsrooms in each region were of similar size. The bigger the full time staff, the more part timers the station was likely to have.

Staff Size Changes 2004 v. 2003

	Increase	Decrease	Same
All TV news	34.0%	16.2%	49.8%
Big four affiliates	34.0	14.9	51.0
Other commercial	36.8	21.1	42.1

For the second year in a row, the percentage of stations reporting staff increases grew – by 6.7 percent – while the percentage of stations reporting staff cuts dropped by 7.3 percent. The same percentage reported staying the same. There were no consistent pattern to the increases (or decreases) by market size. The bigger the total staff, the more likely that the staff had grown, but the reverse was not consistently the case. NBC affiliates were a little less likely to have grown, but all the rest were almost identical, and all of the network affiliates were equally likely to have decreased. Stations in the South and Northeast were a little more likely to have grown than stations in the Midwest or West.

Planned Staff Changes for 2004-2005

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV news	31.1%	3.8%	56.4%	8.7%
Big four affiliates	31.6	3.8	57.7	6.8
Other commercial	21.1	5.3	52.6	21.1

There is almost no difference in these numbers versus one year ago. The one meaningful change involved “other commercial” stations where the percentage of staff decreases dropped – and the percentage planning to remain the same rose.

Amount of News Changes 2004 v. 2003

	Increase	Decrease	Same
All TV News	39.0%	4.5%	56.4%
Big four affiliates	37.6	3.8	58.5
Other commercial	57.9	5.3	36.8
Market size:			
1-25	47.4	10.5	42.1
26-50	37.1	5.7	57.1
51-100	36.1	4.2	59.7
101-150	39.2	3.8	57.0
151+	37.5	0	62.5

The amount of news was most likely to stay the same, but almost 40 percent of TV stations added news. Independents led the way, with over half of those stations adding news. The biggest growth came in the top 50 markets where both network affiliates and “other commercial” stations were most likely to add news. Overall, the bigger the staff, the more likely to increase the amount of news, although that wasn’t an absolutely consistent pattern. Stations in the South and West were the most likely to increase the amount of news, while stations in the Midwest were least likely to increase.

Hours of Local TV News per Day – 2004

	Average weekday	Weekday maximum	Average Saturday	Saturday maximum	Average Sunday	Sunday maximum
All TV news	3.7	20.0	1.4	5.0	1.3	5.0
Big four affiliates	3.9	20.0	1.5	5.0	1.4	5.0
Other commercial	2.3	10.0	1.3	5.0	1.3	5.0
Market size:						
1-25	4.1	10.0	2.0	5.0	2.0	5.0
26-50	4.4	20.0	2.0	4.5	2.1	5.0
51-100	3.9	9.0	1.5	5.0	1.3	4.0
101-150	3.4	15.0	1.2	4.5	1.0	2.5
151+	2.8	5.0	0.8	1.5	0.8	2.0
Staff size:						
Staff 51+	5.3	20.0	2.3	5.0	2.3	5.0
Staff 31-50	3.7	6.0	1.3	5.0	1.1	3.5
Staff 21-30	3.0	5.0	0.9	1.5	0.9	1.5
Staff 11-20	2.7	15.0	0.7	1.0	0.7	1.0
Staff 1-10	1.8	7.5	0.9	4.0	0.8	2.0
Affiliation:						
ABC	3.9	15.0	1.3	4.0	1.3	4.0
CBS	4.3	20.0	1.6	5.0	1.5	5.0
Fox	3.3	8.0	1.3	4.5	1.3	4.5
NBC	3.7	5.5	1.5	5.0	1.3	5.0
PBS	0.7	1.0	0	0	0.6	2.0

After a decline two years ago, the overall amount of news increased again this past year – rising by 12.1 percent on weekdays – or 24 minutes per weekday. That puts the total average weekday news 12 minutes more than the previous all time high. The weekends also edged up after remaining steady the year before. All market sizes and staff sizes saw increases except markets 151+, which remained the same, and staff size 1-10, which dropped slightly. There was no consistent pattern by region, although stations in the West tended to have a little less news than the others.

TV News Budget ... 2004 v. 2003

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Don't know
All TV news	51.2%	13.8%	31.2%	3.8%
Big four affiliates	54.1	12.1	30.7	3.0
Other commercial	33.3	16.7	38.9	11.1
Market size:				
1-25	61.1	8.3	22.2	8.3
26-50	48.6	11.4	37.1	2.9
51-100	49.3	14.1	35.2	1.4
101-150	50.0	19.2	25.6	5.1
151+	50.0	10.0	37.5	2.5

Reflecting staff and news increases, news budgets rose again this year. All categories of stations rose – with a higher percentage saying their budget went up and a lower percentage saying the budget fell. For the first time in three years, a majority of stations said the news budget went up. Generally, the bigger the news staff, the more likely that the budget went up. In fact, the largest newsrooms were more than twice as likely to have had budget increases as the smallest ones. CBS affiliates were most likely to have had budget increases and Fox affiliates and “other commercial” stations the least. Stations in the South and West were far more likely to have budget increases than stations in the Northeast or Midwest.

Amount of News Planned ... 2004 v. 2003

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV news	37.7%	1.1%	52.5%	8.7%
Big four affiliates	35.3	1.3	55.7	7.7
Other commercial	57.9	0	31.6	10.5
Market size:				
1-25	26.3	0	55.3	18.4
26-50	28.6	0	60.0	11.4
51-100	37.0	4.1	50.7	8.2
101-150	44.3	0	49.4	6.3
151+	45.0	0	52.5	2.5

News directors tend to be optimists, but all categories of stations expect to run more news by the end of this year than they ran last year. Stations with smaller staffs – up to 30 people – were more likely to expect to increase the amount of news over the next 12 months. ABC affiliates and other commercial stations were the most likely to expect to increase while Fox stations were considerably less likely to expect to increase the amount of news. Stations in the South and Northeast were the most likely to expect to increase news, while stations in the Midwest were much less likely to expect growth in news.

TV News Profitability ... 1997 to 2004

	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
Showing profit	58.4%	55.3%	54.9%	56%	58%	57%	63%	62%

Breaking even	10.4	13.6	11.6	13	11	9	11	6
Showing loss	9.2	9.2	11.2	10	11	11	10	8
Don't know	22.0	21.9	22.3	21	20	23	16	24

Reflecting a stronger economy, more stations reported making a profit on news than any time since 2000.

TV News Profitability ... by Size and Affiliation - 2004

	Showing profit	Breaking even	Showing loss	Don't know
Market size				
1-25	47.2%	16.7%	19.4%	16.7%
26-50	60.6	6.1	12.1	21.2
51-100	63.1	12.3	6.2	18.5
101-150	64.1	7.7	6.4	21.8
151+	47.4	10.5	7.9	34.2
Staff size:				
51+	66.1	11.9	10.2	11.9
31-50	72.4	9.2	5.3	13.2
21-30	50.0	11.9	4.8	33.3
11-20	41.5	14.6	17.1	26.8
1-10	26.3	5.3	15.8	52.6
Affiliation:				
ABC	64.9	12.3	7.0	15.8
CBS	64.4	9.6	5.5	20.5
Fox	63.3	10.0	13.3	13.3
NBC	58.7	7.9	9.5	23.8
Big four affiliates	62.8	9.9	8.1	19.3
Other commercial	33.3	22.2	11.1	33.3

Stations in markets 26 – 150 were most likely (over 60 percent) to report a profit on news. Markets 1-25 and 150+ were well below that (about 47 percent). Keep in mind that markets 1 – 25 include quite a few small, independent stations. Generally, the larger the staff, the more likely to report a profit on news, although the very largest operations (51+) fell a bit behind the second largest group. NBC affiliates were a little less likely to report a profit than other network affiliates, and “other commercial” stations were about half as likely to report a profit on news. Fox affiliates were slightly more likely to report losing money on news – even though the same percentage of Fox stations said they make a profit as ABC and CBS stations. News departments at stations in the South were the most likely to be profitable, and the Midwest, as usual, lagged slightly behind the others.

Percentage of TV Station Revenue Produced by News - 2004

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Not sure
All TV news	46.1%	50.0%	0	90.0%	74.5%
Market size:					

1-25	41.1	39.0	5.0	67.0	78.1
26-50	40.6	39.0	14.0	90.0	60.0
51-100	50.1	50.0	32.0	70.0	74.2
101-150	44.4	47.5	0	65.0	74.7
151+	57.1	60.0	45.0	75.0	83.3
Staff size:					
51+	46.8	50.0	14.0	90.0	56.6
31-50	42.7	45.0	0	75.0	68.8
21-30	52.2	50.0	40.0	60.0	81.0
11-20	49.2	51.0	30.0	65.0	86.8
1-10	-	-	-	-	100.0
Affiliation:					
ABC	46.6	50.0	0	70.0	64.8
CBS	53.2	50.0	25.0	90.0	72.5
Fox	27.3	25.0	14.0	40.0	78.6
NBC	46.9	49.0	25.0	65.0	79.0
Big four affiliates	47.0	50.0	0	90.0	73.2
Other commercial	33.4	35.0	5.0	67.0	76.5

The overall percentage of station revenue generated by news rose substantially in the last year, from 39.7 percent a year ago to 46.1 percent this time. All market sizes rose except 101-150, which slid slightly from a year ago. On the other hand, view the figures with some care. Given the high percentage of news directors who say that they don't know (including all the news directors at non network affiliates), view these numbers cautiously.

Radio

Consolidation in radio forced us to change our methodology in collecting data on radio news last year, and that makes long term comparisons difficult to do. Today, 94.9 percent of all radio news departments handle news on more than one station. In fact, the average news department runs news on 3.6 stations; the median number of stations is 3.0. Both of those are record highs, and both of those just include stations within the market. Almost four in 10 radio news departments (35.1 percent) say they do news for one or more stations outside their own market.

Radio Staff Size - 2004

	Avg. full-time	Median full-time	Max full-time	Avg part-time	Med part-time	Max part-time	Avg total staff	Med total staff	Max total staff
All radio news	1.8	1.0	11	1.0	0	15	2.8	1.0	18
Market size:									
Major	4.1	4.0	11	3.5	2.0	15	7.6	8.0	18

Large	1.9	1.0	8	1.2	1.0	5	3.0	1.0	13
Medium	1.5	1.0	8	0.7	0	12	2.2	1.0	13
Small	1.0	1.0	3	0.2	0	2	1.2	1.0	4

Radio staff size appears to have fallen sharply in the past year. On the other hand, consolidation required a change in methodology for collecting the radio data, and we may need another year of data in the new system in order to get a clearer picture of what's happening.

Average Minutes of Locally-Produced Radio News - 2004

	All radio	Major market	Large market	Medium market	Small market
Weekdays:					
AM drive	15.4	16.1	20.3	14.1	15.5
Midday	6.4	13.3	4.1	5.1	5.9
PM drive	6.7	10.7	6.3	6.1	5.6
Night	1.7	5.7	1.6	1.2	0.6
Total weekday	30.2	45.8	32.3	26.5	27.6
Saturday:					
AM drive	5.5	7.6	7.1	5.0	4.6
Midday	1.9	3.0	1.7	1.4	2.4
PM drive	1.4	3.1	1.7	1.0	1.2
Night	0.9	2.3	1.1	0.8	0.2
Total Saturday	9.7	16.0	11.6	8.2	8.4
Sunday:					
AM drive	2.7	7.6	0.9	1.9	2.0
Midday	1.3	2.6	1.4	0.8	1.4
PM drive	1.2	2.4	1.7	0.9	0.8
Night	0.7	2.3	1.1	0.5	0.2
Total Sunday	5.9	14.9	5.1	4.1	4.4

All time periods for all categories of stations show less total news than a year ago. But, as with other radio data, consolidation makes it difficult to be sure that that's what is taking place.

Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2004

One	28.7%
Two	19.7
Three	17.2
Four	9.8
Five	12.3
Six	8.2
Seven	0.8
Eight	3.3

Average 3.0
 Median 3.0
 Maximum 8

The figures are up noticeably from last year. The average number rose from 2.9 to 3.0, and the median – or more typical number – jumped from two to three.

What Else Radio News Directors Do – 2004

Announcing 21.0%
 Sports 18.5
 Production 14.8
 Program Director 13.6
 Sales 12.3
 Programming 11.1
 Public Affairs 9.9
 Technical 7.4
 Public Service 6.2
 Other 19.7

Overall, 74.1 percent of radio news directors say they handle other responsibilities at the station. That's close to last year's 77.8 percent. More than two-thirds of news directors in every market category reported handling other jobs. The biggest changes from a year ago: A drop in public affairs and an increase in sales.

Changes in Radio News, Staff and Budget in the last 12 months and planned for the future – 2004

	Increase	Same	Decrease	Note sure
Total staff the past year	20.0%	70.8%	9.2%	0
Plan to change amount of staff next year	15.0	76.7	0.8	7.5
Amount of news the past year	44.2	53.3	2.5	0
Plan to change amount of news next year	23.3	69.2	0.8	6.7
Change in news budget from the year before	17.2	52.6	11.2	19.0

There is little consistent pattern in these numbers. Most stations report staying the same in all categories. Major markets are most likely to have increased news budget, most likely to have gone up in staff and most likely to expect to increase staff. The smallest markets are the least likely in all categories.

Radio News Profitability ... 1997 to 2004

	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
Showing profit	22.5%	25.2%	15.2%	17%	25%	19%	22%	23%
Breaking even	17.1	13.8	13.9	17	15	18	14	20
Showing loss	7.2	2.4	7.3	0	7	6	6	6

Don't know	53.2	58.6	63.6	66	53	57	58	51
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The smallest markets are most likely to report a profit on news, but more than half continue to report that they don't know whether news makes a profit.

Radio News Profitability by Market Size - 2004

	Showing profit	Breaking even	Showing loss	Don't know
Major market	13.3%	13.3%	13.3%	60.0%
Large market	18.2	27.3	0	54.5
Medium market	18.4	18.4	6.1	57.1%
Small market	33.3	13.9	8.3	44.4

Major markets are 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.

Daily Use of Digital Equipment and New Technology in Radio News – 2004

	Digital audio recording	Digital editing and mixing	Digital or cellular phones	Field laptops for editing	MPEG audio layer 3	Internet research or email
All radio	79.8%	71.9%	71.1%	11.4%	55.3%	90.4%
Major market	86.7	86.7	73.3	33.3	66.7	93.3
Large market	83.3	50.0	66.7	0	16.7	75.0
Medium market	84.6	76.9	69.2	9.6	55.8	94.2
Small market	68.6	65.7	74.3	8.6	62.9	88.6

After steady growth in the past, these numbers reflect relatively small changes from a year ago. Group owned stations are a little more likely to be more technologically advanced – but that could be because groups are more likely to own in larger markets, which are a little more likely to have more new technology.

Percentage of News Material Gathered, Edited and Aired Digitally - 2004

	Percent of news gathered digitally	Percent of news material mixed and edited digitally	Percent of news material aired digitally
All radio - average	57.0%	72.2%	73.6%
All radio -	62.5	100	100

median			
Major market - average	73.6	92.9	81.4
Major market – median	97.5	100	100
Large market - average	67.2	81.1	78.4
Large market – median	75.0	100	100
Medium market – average	62.2	71.4	78.4
Medium market – median	72.5	100	100
Small market – average	38.6	61.5	64.3
Small market – median	30.0	75.0	90.0

Most of these numbers have edged up from a year ago, although the smallest markets are less consistent.

Percentage of TV News Departments Providing Content to Other Media – 2004

	Station website	Another TV station	Cable TV channel	Local radio
All TV	66.0%	18.1%	10.9%	43.0%
Big four affiliates	70.2	19.1	11.9	45.1
Other commercial	26.3	10.5	5.3	15.8
Market size:				
1-25	42.1	21.1	5.3	36.8
26-50	80.0	17.1	8.6	37.1
51-100	63.0	16.4	16.4	47.9
101-150	68.4	19.0	11.4	44.3
151+	77.5	17.5	7.5	42.5

These figures are little changed from a year ago.

TV News ... Contracts & Non-Competes

	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999
Percentage of TV news people under contract	55.1%	51.8%	52.5%	50.2%	44.3%	42.2%

After a few years of leveling off at just over half, the percentage under contract in television has gone up to its highest level since we started asking the question. More

than four of five (80.4 percent) of those with contracts also have non-compete agreements.

TV News ... Percentage Under Contract by Position

	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999
News director	33%	36%	37%	32%	32%	29%
Asst. news director	47	46	47	31	31	27
Executive producer	58	41	45	55	39	42
Managing editor	47	41	52	54	33	27
News producer	62	56	59	57	48	40
Assignment editor	26	26	32	33	26	23
News anchor	90	85	85	78	74	75
Weathercaster	86	83	82	76	74	66
Sports anchor	84	82	80	71	71	64
News reporter	77	70	65	60	54	53
News writer	3	8	9	21	7	11
News assistant	2	11	5	14	5	2
Sports reporter	57	48	43	48	39	38
Photographer	11	9	14	17	10	11
Tape editor	1	3	9	11	2	3
Graphics specialist	9	8	6	8	12	9
Internet specialist	10	7	17	20	12	15

Most of the job categories rose this past year, but it's not consistent. The biggest jump came among executive producers.

Radio News ... Percentage Under Contract or Non-Compete - 2002

	Under contract	Under non-compete
News director	21%	55%
News anchor	28	36
News reporter	17	50
News producer	20	67
Sports anchor	13	67

Most of the radio categories rose modestly from last year.

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.