

Station web sites grow bigger and more complex
by Bob Papper

The latest RTNDA/Ball State University Survey shows web sites are nearly universal in TV, and local news is an integral part of that. There's also been a huge jump in the complexity of TV web sites. Radio web sites generally lag behind TV sites in complexity, but the past year has seen significant upgrades in radio websites as well.

Who Has Web Sites?

All TV	97.1%	All Radio	88.4%
Market Size		Market Size	
1 - 25	89.5	Major	100.0
26 - 50	100.0	Large	100.0
51 - 100	100.0	Medium	86.4
101 - 150	98.6	Small	81.4
151+	94.9		

In TV, station web sites are virtually universal, and virtually every large news operation (31 or more news employees) had one. Only stations with 1-10 news staffers came in below 96 percent (at 85.7 percent). There were no meaningful differences based on network affiliation or geography. Radio is largely unchanged from a year ago. Other than market size, there were no meaningful predictors of radio station websites, although group-owned stations were a little more likely to have them than independent stations (90.3 percent versus 83.3 percent).

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.

How Many Web Sites Include Local News?

All TV	97.5%	All Radio	67.8%
Market Size		Market Size	
1 - 25	89.2	Major	66.7
26 - 50	100.0	Large	65.6
51 - 100	100.0	Medium	70.2
101 - 150	97.1	Small	66.7
151+	100.0		

Among the TV stations with web sites, nearly every station in every category includes local news--except those stations with just 1-10 newsroom employees (at 73.7 percent). Only one network affiliate (a Fox station) didn't have local news on its web site. The percentage of radio station web sites that include local news (of those that had a web site) slipped again from a year ago -- although only by 2 percent. Single, stand-alone stations, stations with a news staff of one and independent stations were all less likely to run local news on the web.

Elements of Local News Web Sites

TV	Text	Still Pics	Audio	Strmng Audio	Live Cam	Nws Vid	Live Nwscsts	Rcrdcd Nwscsts	Blogs	Pdcsts	Assmble Own Nwscsts
All TV:	97.0%	82.4%	48.5%	34.3%	43.3%	78.5%	17.6%	36.9%	33.5%	15.9%	10.3%
Markets 1 - 25	93.9	81.8	54.5	42.4	54.5	81.8	21.2	30.3	45.5	21.2	9.1
Markets 26 - 50	100.0	82.5	62.5	37.5	55.0	90.0	25.0	42.5	45.0	27.5	15.0
Markets 51 - 100	94.4	85.2	53.7	37.0	46.3	77.8	16.7	35.2	35.2	20.4	7.4
Markets 101 - 150	97.1	81.2	43.5	29.0	37.8	69.6	13.0	34.8	26.1	11.6	11.6
Markets 151+	100.0	81.1	29.7	29.7	32.4	81.1	16.2	43.2	21.6	0	8.1

Radio	Text	Still Pics	Audio	Strmng Audio	Live Cam	Nws Vid	Live Nwscsts	Rcrdcd Nwscsts	Blogs	Pdcsts	Other
All Radio:	90.3%	49.5%	32.0%	25.2%	2.9%	5.8%	10.7%	19.4%	14.6%	20.4%	6.8%
Major Market	100.0	80.0	80.0	80.0	10.0	30.0	30.0	50.0	50.0	70.0	0.0
Large Market	100.0	71.4	28.6	28.6	4.8	4.8	9.5	9.5	14.3	33.3	0.0
Medium	87.5	40.0	25.0	15.0	0.0	2.5	10.0	17.5	17.5	12.5	7.5

Market											
Small Market	84.4	37.5	28.1	18.8	3.1	3.1	6.3	18.8	0.0	6.3	12.5

In this measure of web site complexity, there was a big jump in TV web sites from last year. There was a 5 percent increase in live cameras, a 10 percent jump in the use of still pictures, a 14 percent boost in the use of audio and a 20 percent climb in the use of news video. This is the first time we've asked about live or recorded newscasts, blogs, podcasts and the ability of users to assemble their own newscasts on the web. We added the same categories to the radio survey, but all comparable headings except one rose from a year ago. Text rose slightly, but news video rose by more than 3 percent, audio and still pictures rose by 6-8 percent each, and live cameras rose by 10 percent. Streaming audio actually fell by about 2 percent. In radio, generally the bigger the staff and the bigger the market, the more complex the web site.

What Do Users Want From Your Site?

Rank This Year	All TV This Year	TV Rank Last Year	All Radio This Year	Radio Rank Last Year
1	Local weather	1	Local news	1
2	Local news	2	Local weather	4
3	Live cameras	9	Other information	3
4	Headlines	6	Local sports	8
5	Local sports	7	Food	6
6	Money	3	Money	16
7	Other info	4	Entertainment news	5
8	Entertainment news	5	Talent bios	13
9	Traffic	10	Live cameras	7
10	Consumer news	14	National news	17
11	Education	13	Weather elsewhere	9
12	National news	12	Traffic	14
13	Sports	17	Consumer news	2

	elsewhere			
14	Weather elsewhere	8	Headlines	12
15	Food	18	Sports elsewhere	18
16	International news	11	International news	11
17	Health	15	Education	15
18	Talent bios	16	Health	10

In TV, for the sixth year in a row, local weather and local news lead the way, but after that, the order didn't change dramatically from a year ago. Only three items moved up more than two places: Live cameras rose from 9 last year to 3 this year, Consumer news rose from 14 to 10, and Sports elsewhere rose from 17 to 13. Six items dropped more than two places, but only two of them fell more than three spots: Weather elsewhere dropped from 8 to 14, and International news fell from 11 to 16. As with TV, radio has local news and local weather at the top of the list -- although in reverse order. Making big moves up: Local sports, Talent bios, Money and National news. Dropping noticeably from a year ago: Consumer news, Health and International news. Notice that the only similar meaningful movement across both TV and radio websites was the decrease in interest in International news.

How Many People Work on the Web?

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All TV	1.99	1.78	3.77
Markets 1-25	2.06	0.77	2.83
Markets 26-50	1.38	2.68	4.06
Markets 51-100	1.24	2.27	3.51
Markets 101-150	2.52	1.55	4.07
Markets 151+	2.71	1.35	4.06
All Radio	1.1	0.9	2.0
Major Market	1.2	1.0	2.2
Large Market	1.0	1.0	2.0
Medium Market	1.1	0.8	1.9
Small Market	1.1	0.8	1.9

In TV, web staffs rose by about one from a year ago: up about half a full time person and up about a half a part time person. Overall, NBC affiliates had the largest web staffs, followed by CBS. Independents had the smallest web staffs. The total web staff size was consistent across all geographic areas, but the South and West tended to have more full time staff with the Northeast and Midwest having more part timers. As usual, there's not a direct relationship between market size and web staffing. While there's more of a relationship to news department staff size – in that the smallest news departments have the smallest web staff – even overall news department staffing doesn't tell us much about web staffing. The largest news departments had slightly more full time web people than most of the others, but a small part time crew meant that the biggest newsrooms, overall, were the second smallest in total full time and part time web staffing. That suggests that web staffing may be more a product of management philosophy and perhaps market conditions than anything else. There were few meaningful web staffing differences based on network affiliation or geography. In radio, full time and part time web staffs each rose by 0.3, raising total staffing by just over half a person. Group-owned stations had about a half a person more staff than independent stations, but, otherwise, there were no consistent patterns based on staff, number of stations or region.

Do Other Staffers Help on the Web?

All TV	41.9%
Markets 1-25	21.9
Markets 26-50	39.2
Markets 51-100	44.5
Markets 101-150	45.5
Markets 151+	49.7
All Radio	59.8%
Major Market	81.4
Large Market	48.3
Medium Market	67.9
Small Market	52.4

In TV, the percentage of news staffers with web responsibilities rose noticeably from last year (34.4 percent to 41.9 percent). That compares to a two percent increase a year ago. All market sizes rose except the top 25, which remained the same. All newsroom staff sizes are in the 40 percent range except the largest (51+), which is at 25.3 percent. Radio edged down from 64.1 percent last year to 59.8 percent this time, but last year's figure represented a huge jump from the year before. Clearly, a lot more radio news people are now expected to pitch in on the web.

News Director Role with Web Site

	In Charge	In Charge of News Content Only	No Management Role/Other
All TV	25.6%	67.4%	7.0%
Markets 1-25	39.4	51.5	9.1
Markets 26-50	30.8	59.0	10.3
Markets 51-100	20.4	72.2	7.4
Markets 101-150	24.2	69.7	6.1
Markets 151+	17.1	80.0	2.9
All Radio	17.1%	61.6%	27.8%
Major Market	7.1	71.4	21.4
Large Market	3.7	70.4	25.9
Medium Market	19.0	65.5	15.5
Small Market	25.5	48.9	25.5

Once again, the role of TV news directors in the station web site increased in the last year. The percentage of news directors reporting no role in the station web site dropped in half (from 15.1 percent to 7 percent) with 5 percent moving to in charge overall and 3 percent going to in charge of the news. The larger the market, the more likely that the news director will be in charge overall, but there's no relationship to staff size or network affiliation. The only other correlation was that news directors in the smallest shops (1-10 news employees) were much less likely to be in charge of the news on the web site (46.7 percent versus 70.4 percent for all others), and they were more likely to have no role in the station

web site at all (26.7 percent versus 5.4 percent for all others). In radio, the percentage of news directors in charge overall and with no role at all both dropped, while the percentage in charge of news content skyrocketed from 35.7 percent last year to 61.6 percent this year.

TV Station Website Traffic During the Past 30 Days

	Page Views (in millions)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All TV	1.8	159.1
Market Size		
1-25	2.6	335.7
26-50	3.4	188.4
51-100	1.7	142.7
101-150	1.3	111.4
151+	0.4	63.8

There has been a big jump this year in the number of news directors who could report web traffic, so the figures above should be far more accurate than earlier estimates based on scant reporting. Overall, CBS and NBC affiliates reported the highest page views, with ABC affiliates well behind that and Fox affiliates well behind ABC. Among unique visitors, CBS stations had a slight lead over ABC and NBC stations with Fox at half that level. The number of radio news directors reporting web traffic remains too small to be reliable.

Making Money?

	Profit	Breaking Even	Loss	Don't Know
All TV	22.8%	11.2%	17.4%	48.7%
Markets 1-25	26.7	6.7	16.7	50.0
Markets 26-50	32.5	5.0	20.0	42.5
Markets 51-100	17.3	15.4	19.2	48.1
Markets 101-150	17.9	7.5	17.9	56.7
Markets 151+	25.7	22.9	11.4	40.0
All Radio	10.7%	16.5%	15.7%	57.0%
Major Market	25.0	8.3	8.3	58.3
Large Market	8.3	12.5	12.5	66.7
Medium Market	8.9	20.0	22.2	48.9

Small Market	10.0	17.5	12.5	60.0
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The percentage of stations reporting a profit from the web site is only slightly changed from last year -- down from 24 percent to 22.8 percent. Those reporting a loss increased from 13 percent last year to 17.4 percent this year. There was a direct relationship between profit and size. Almost 40 percent of the news departments with the largest staffs made a profit -- straight down to 6.3 percent of the smallest newsrooms. In radio, the percentage of stations reporting a profit or a loss both rose by about 5 percent. The stations reporting breaking even fell by about 4 percent. The percentage saying they didn't know fell by just over 8 percent, but it still remains quite high. Although stations in major markets did better than all the others, there were no other consistent patterns based on staff size, ownership, number of stations or region.

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 2006 among all 1,596 operating, non-satellite television stations and all XXX radio stations. Valid responses came from 974 television stations (50.9 percent) and 225 radio news directors and general managers representing 740 radio stations.