

BY BOB PAPPER AND
MICHAEL GERHARD

Growing Pains

Our annual newsroom work force study shows that TV and radio news operations continued to add news and staff in 1997, but not at the same clip they did the year before. Those surveyed project even slower growth in 1998.

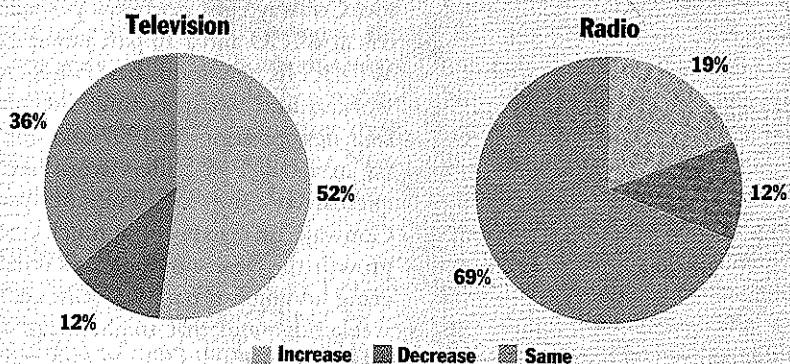


LARS KLOVE/THE IMAGE BANK

In 1997, news director Robert Campbell doubled the amount of weekday news his station produced, going from 90 minutes a day to three hours. To keep up, he added one full-time person and a couple part-timers. "We're stretched every day," says Campbell, of KMTR-TV in Eugene, OR, "but we made some changes in philosophy not to cover every accident. We do a lot of real news." Campbell says he'd like to open another bureau and even add more news. He'd like to add staff, too. "We need more of everything," he says.

Campbell's newsroom is typical, according to the 1997 RTNDA/Ball State University Survey, which again showed strong growth in television news and staffing in 1997—with radio generally holding its own. But while news directors are still scrambling to fill those added news slots, the rate of growth seems to be slowing down. Even so, the average TV news staff increased from 28 in 1996 to 30 in 1997, with the typical station running three hours of news each weekday. Radio generally stayed about the same.

Size of News Staff: 1997 vs. 1996



There was clear growth in the size of television news staffs and slight growth in radio. But in both cases, the growth is below 1996 levels, when 60 percent of TV stations and 21 percent of radio stations reported increases.

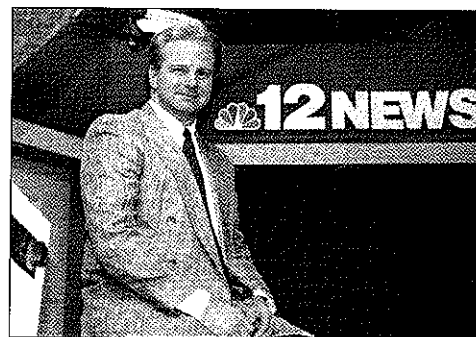
Source: RTNDA/Ball State University Study, 1997



Duane Wallace is news director at WMBD-TV and WMBD-AM/FM in Peoria, IL.



Lena Sadiwskyj (right) is news director at KSLA-TV in Shreveport, LA.



Mike Conway is news director at WICU-TV in Erie, PA.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 1997 among all 1,254 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 865 radio stations. Valid responses came from 724 television stations (57.7 percent) and 334 radio stations (38.6 percent).

Television

At 4.5 hours per weekday of local news, WXYZ-TV in Detroit is right on the median for large news departments. News director Dan Salamone says when the station added a half-hour health program on Sunday mornings last year—an extension of its regular health reports—it added three new people to staff (a producer, researcher and photographer). That brings the news staff to about 110 people full-time and 10 part-time. This year, Salamone expects modest growth in both news and staff, adding two more reporters in order to be “a little more aggressive” on the street.

Adding News and Staff

Greg Boyce, news director at KOAA-TV in Colorado Springs/Pueblo, CO, added a 5 p.m. newscast in 1997, making 17 hours of news per week. Boyce added six people: an anchor/reporter, producer, reporter, photographer, tape editor and

weekend assignment editor/reporter. The station now has “around 40” people, and Boyce does not expect any changes in staff or news in 1998.

In Shreveport, LA, news director Lena Sadiwskyj added an hour Sunday morning on KSLA-TV. Staff didn’t

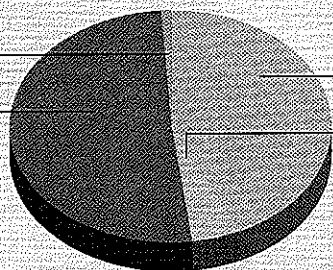
change in size, but it did shift—with a sports person leaving and a news manager in his place. The station runs 3.5 hours of news each weekday and two hours on the weekend with 43 people full-time and two part-time. At this point, Sadiwskyj expects no changes in staff or news this year.

Brad Remington, news director at KOB-TV in Albuquerque, NM, added three people last year: two anchor/reporters and one photographer. Remington also reorganized the staff. The amount of news, which had increased in 1996, remained the same. Remington says the news department now numbers in the low 50s with three hours of news each weekday. He says he’s “looking at” more news, but will not increase the staff this year.

WBOY-TV in Clarksburg, WV, added two half-hours of news to the three it already had. News director Bob Walters says they did it with the same staff: 16 full-time and one part-time. “I’ve stretched it to the limit,” says Walters. “There’s no more I can do. We’re literally crippled when someone is off for the day—sick or on vacation.”

Amount of TV News: 1997 vs. 1996

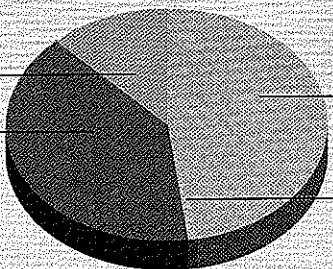
Don't Know 1%
Stayed the Same 51%



Increased 43%
Decreased 5%

Amount of TV News Planned for 1998

Don't Know 12%
Stay the Same 40%



Increase 47%
Decrease 1%

In 1997, market size was less of a factor in the amount of news than was staff size. Generally, the larger the staff, the more likely an increase in news.

Changing Affiliations

While 97 to 98 percent of ABC, CBS and NBC affiliates run local news, Fox stations are just shy of the halfway mark, at 49 percent (see chart on page 9).

Some Fox affiliates still get news from others. That’s the case in Erie, PA. Mike Conway is news director for NBC affiliate WICU-TV, and produces news for the Fox station WFXP-TV, too. Conway runs 2.5 hours per weekday at WICU and a 10 p.m. newscast at WFXP. His newsroom has 26 full-time workers and two part-time, including four new positions in 1997 and one so far in 1998. Two staffers work almost exclusively on the Fox newscast. Conway isn’t expecting much more growth this year, although he’s considering adding a 6 p.m. newscast on the weekends—and that might mean one more position.

Dave Winstrom hired most of his staff in 1997. He’s news director at WVLT-TV in Knoxville, TN. The CBS affiliate had nine people in news when Gray Communications took over at the

end of 1996. Now there are 46 full-time and several part-time, putting out three hours of news each weekday and two hours on the weekends. Winstrom may add some news this year but does not expect to increase staff.

News director Dan Acklen has watched his department move way up and way down at KSTW-TV in Seattle. The station went from an independent to a CBS affiliate to a Paramount-

For TV, Agre runs about 15 to 20 minutes of local news and weather around 10:30 p.m. He tapes the news in the late afternoon or early evening, because he does the radio news live in the morning on KXGN-AM while taping the news for KDZN-FM.

owned UPN station. There were rumors that Paramount would dump local news completely, so Acklen says morale has bounced all over the place. Now, the situation has stabilized, the station runs a one-hour 10 p.m. news-cast seven nights a week, and Acklen says morale is back up. At one point, the station was running 2.5 hours of news a day with about 80 people. The station lost 25 people when Paramount took over, and more jumped ship later. Now the news department has 41 people.

Holding the Line

Mike Snuffer switched jobs in 1997—from news director at KCEN-TV in Waco, TX, to news director at KLBK-TV in Lubbock, TX. Snuffer says the Waco station added staff in 1997, but in Lubbock, there's been more reorganization. He lost a reporter and decided to add a producer instead. He converted

TV Staff Size: 1997

	Average Full-time Staff	Average Part-time Staff	Average Total Staff
All Television	30	4	34
Four Network Affiliates	31	5	36
Other Stations	19	4	23
ADI 1-25	57	6	63
ADI 26-50	47	6	53
ADI 51-100	33	5	38
ADI 101-150	24	4	28
ADI 151+	15	3	18

Overall, the average TV staff is up two full-time people from 1996, with all of the gain in the middle market sizes. The top 25 markets are down from last year, but that's probably a sampling problem based on how few stations in the top half of this group returned the survey. The smallest markets also dropped slightly from a year ago. Among network affiliates, NBC stations edged out CBS' for the largest staffs, followed by ABC affiliates and then Fox.

Hours of Local TV News Per Day

	Weekday Median	Saturday Median	Sunday Median
All Stations	3.0	1.0	1.0
ADI 1-25	3.0	1.0	2.0
ADI 26-50	3.5	1.0	1.0
ADI 51-100	3.5	1.0	1.0
ADI 101-150	3.0	1.0	1.0
ADI 151+	2.0	0.5	0
Full-Time Staff 51+	4.5	1.5	1.5
Full-Time Staff 31-50	3.5	1.0	1.0
Full-Time Staff 21-30	2.8	1.0	1.0
Full-Time Staff 11-20	2.2	1.0	0.5
Full-Time Staff 1-10	1.0	0	0

The median number of news hours for a TV station was 17 hours per week. This finding probably understates the amount of news—especially in the top 25 markets—because so few of the upper half of that group responded to the survey. Overall, the amount of news run on television has edged up steadily year after year.

Source for all charts: RTNDA/Ball State University Study, 1997

four part-timers into two full-time slots. Now they have 23 full-time and two part-time, and Snuffer says he hopes to add an assistant news director. The amount of news has remained the same: three hours per weekday and 90 minutes on the weekend. "We're stabilizing at this point," says Snuffer. "I want to see how we're doing and fine-tune the product."

Duane Wallace is news director for WMBD-TV in Peoria, IL, as well as WMBD-AM and WPBG-FM. Wallace has 34 full-timers at the TV station and four at the radio station and expects no change this year.

Ed Agre is the news director and entire news department in the country's smallest television market: KXGN-TV in Glendive, MT. And he handles the news on two radio stations, too. For TV, Agre runs about 15 to 20 minutes of local news and weather around 10:30 p.m. He tapes the news in the late afternoon or early evening, because he does the radio news live in the morning on KXGN-AM while taping the news for KDZN-FM. There's been no change in how they've done the news on radio or TV in the five years Agre has been there. "It gets a little hectic at times," he says.

Radio

Michelle Dibble is news director at KYKY-FM in St. Louis. There has been no cutback in staff or news, but the station has cut back on the news service it buys. News runs on the half-hour from 5:30 to 8:30 a.m., then "shuts down" after that. She now supplements the wire with Metro Traffic and the newspapers. "I don't expect any sort of expansion," Dibble says. "It's more likely [that news would] disappear completely, but I don't think so. Our listeners demand and depend on our news."

Andi Parker is the part-time news director at KTRS-FM and KYOD-FM in Casper, WY. She's on the air live on the half-hour at KTRS and on the hour at KYOD. Then, after 9 a.m., she's

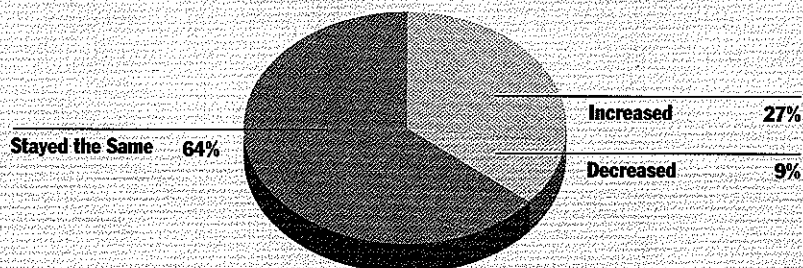
off to her full-time job in production at a local television station. The radio stations offered her a full-time job, but she says she simply can't afford it. "Radio doesn't pay that much," she says, so

Parker takes it day by day and hopes to parlay her radio experience into a job in TV news.

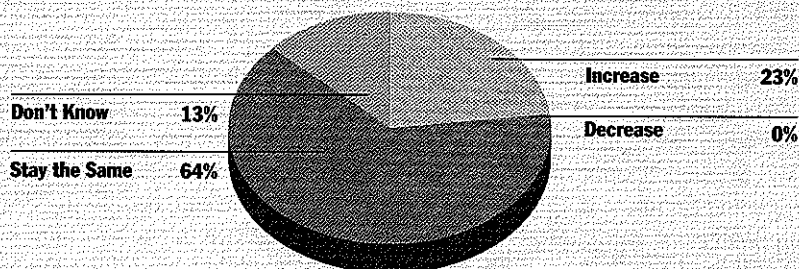
Susan Hawthorne is most of the news department at WKDW-AM, WSVO-FM and WINF-AM in Staunton, VA. She has five part-timers. They go out and get the sound, and Hawthorne does the writing. Her day starts at 3:30 a.m., and she's live on all three stations: on the hour and half-hour on the news station, :05 on country, and :50 on oldies. And they're different newscasts. While there's no news on the oldies station after 8:30 a.m., the others continue into or through the afternoon (prerecorded).

WWMG-FM in Charlotte, NC, has added news, but not with news director Liz Luke. She anchors morning drive and works until noon. Metro Traffic takes over news in the afternoon and on Saturday. "If the audience wants more, they'll tune to a news/talk station or NPR," says Luke, who runs 2-3 minute newscasts with about eight stories, heavy on lifestyle.

Amount of Radio News: 1997 vs. 1996



Amount of Radio News Planned for 1998



While declines were evenly spread across the board, major-market stations were dramatically less likely to increase news than all the others (82 percent of major-market stations remained the same in 1997). For 1998, news directors in all market sizes come close to the same projections.

Cutting Back on News

Pat Gaffney is the news director at WMAS-AM and FM in Springfield, MA. There's been no change in staff there, but there's less news on FM. "The consultants said we were a music station, and that's where our focus should be," says Gaffney. She's been at the station a dozen years. "When I started, we had six people. Year by year, that slowly eroded," says Gaffney, who is "the last surviving person" along with a part-timer. "I have a second job in the afternoon to pay the bills," says Gaffney, who works in a doctor's office typing transcriptions. She doesn't see any changes on the horizon unless the public demands a change, and she doesn't see that happening. "I have a pride in what I do," says Gaffney, "so I try to make it work for me. But it's the almighty dollar talking here."

Tight money can make public radio a challenge, too. Robert Nosbisch is news director at NPR-affiliate KRWG-FM in Las Cruces, NM. He's the only full-time person in news, but he has five students who

work at the station. They do extensive news in the morning and afternoon along with longer pieces three times a week and a couple public affairs shows. Nosbisch lost a part-time professional last year. Nosbisch says the likelihood of getting more money and people would be like "wishing upon a star." He says he's more worried that the limited amount of money he has to pay students will be cut back.

WSB-AM in Atlanta had no changes in staff or news in 1997. News director Chris Camp has a staff of seven full-time and five part-time—plus weather. That's the same as it has been for the last few years, and Camp expects no change this year. Camp's newsroom also provides material for WCNN-AM. WSB-FM and WJZF-FM also use WSB material in the newsroom. "Who'd have thought we would be providing information programming to four stations?" says Camp.

Handling More Than Just News

More than three-quarters of the radio news directors report they have responsibilities other than news. Other tasks include being an on-air personality, public service director, sports reporter and general manager.

Xavier Flores spoke with us during his regular 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. board shift on KNAF-AM. He's news director for that station as well as KFAN-FM in Johnson City, TX. He's been there since 1985. "The pay sucks," says Flores, "but I must like the work itself because it isn't the money holding me here." Flores says there's no local television, so radio news is a real lifeblood for the community. He says the newscasts are easy to sell because of the obituaries he runs.

Lee Bowen is news director for WNLS-AM, WTNT-FM, WXSJ-FM, WSNI-FM and WJZT-FM in Tallahassee, FL. He reads the news on two stations and writes it for the others. In addition, he's program director for the sports station and handles play-by-play for college baseball. "When I came here in 1982, we had two stations and five people," says Bowen. "Now we have five stations and one person—who doesn't do news full-time. That's a

Radio Staff Size: 1997

	Average Full-time Staff	Average Part-time Staff	Average Total Staff
All Radio	2.1	1.3	3.4
AM only	4.2	1.5	5.7
FM only	1.2	1.5	2.7
AM/FM	1.8	1.0	2.8
Major Market	5.6	1.6	7.2
Large Market	2.2	1.1	3.3
Medium Market	1.6	1.3	2.9
Small Market	1.0	1.3	2.3

Radio newsrooms increased only slightly in 1997, when full-time staff averaged 1.9 for all radio. The growth came in AM-only stations and major and medium markets. Large markets edged down slightly, and small markets dropped from 1.4 in 1996 to 1.0 last year. There was no significant change in part-timers.

Average Minutes of Locally Produced Radio News

	All Radio	Major Market	Large Market	Medium Market	Small Market
Weekday a.m. Drive	28.4	49.9	32.4	25.4	19.1
Weekday Midday	10.6	12.9	9.4	8.7	12.6
Weekday p.m. Drive	13.9	20.0	12.5	13.5	12.5
Weekday Night	3.1	3.2	3.9	2.4	3.8
Saturday a.m. Drive	8.0	10.1	8.7	6.7	8.7
Saturday Midday	3.6	2.7	4.3	2.9	4.8
Saturday p.m. Drive	2.3	1.8	3.8	1.8	2.4
Saturday Night	1.6	0.8	3.9	1.1	1.6
Sunday a.m. Drive	4.4	4.8	9.3	2.7	4.0
Sunday Midday	2.5	3.2	2.4	1.6	3.2
Sunday p.m. Drive	1.4	1.7	3.8	1.3	1.3
Sunday Night	1.4	0.8	3.9	0.6	1.6

These numbers clearly illustrate the emphasis on news in morning drive and how it drops off in the evenings and on weekends.

Source for all charts: RTNDA/Ball State University Study, 1997

good comment on the state of the business in small markets." The station uses no audio and has no one on the street. "Basically, it's smoke and mirrors," says Bowen. "I get what's in the papers. What I do is not journalism, it's plagiarism. It's all I have time to do, and all they (management) want me to do. If I complain, I'm labeled a purist who doesn't understand the '90s." Bowen says it all comes down to market research. "Management believes we're

giving the listeners what they want," he says. ■

Bob Papper is associate professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Michael Gerhard, Ph.D., is associate professor of telecommunications at Ball State and has extensive industry and research experience. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio-Television News Directors Association.