

Size of News Staff: 1998 vs. 1997

Television

Increase: 46%
Decrease: 18%
Same: 37%

Radio

Increase: 13%
Decrease: 13%
Same: 72%
Don't Know: 2%

In television, the growth in staff size continues, but the rate continues to drop. Over the last four years, the percentage of TV stations increasing staff has dropped from 63 percent to 46 percent, and the percentage of stations decreasing staff has risen from 6 percent to 18 percent. Overall, the biggest markets were the most likely to increase, but it varied after that. CBS affiliates were less likely to increase and more likely to decrease, but there were no other meaningful patterns. Over the last several years, radio staff size has generally held steady, although this is the first year in the last four where the stations increasing staff have not outpaced the stations decreasing staff.

Amount of TV News: 1998 vs. 1997

Increased: 42%
Decreased: 8%
Same: 50%

Again, over the past several years, TV continues to increase the amount of news, but the rate of that increase continues to slow. Four years ago, 49 percent of stations increased news and only 3 percent decreased it. There's little variation by market size, but, not surprisingly, the very smallest staffs (1-10) were less likely to increase the amount of news. Fox affiliates were slightly more likely to increase news than others, but they were also much more likely to decrease news. A quarter of the Fox stations reported cutting back on news. The volume leader reported running 8 hours of news on weekdays and 6 hours each on Saturday and Sunday.

Amount of TV News Planned for 1999

Increase: 39%
Decrease: 1%
Same: 50%

Not Sure: 9%

Again, while the stations continue to expect growth, the rate continues to drop. Four years ago, more than half the stations planned to increase news. There little meaningful variation in the figures by market size or region. The largest news operations were a little less likely to expect to expand news.

TV Staff Size:

	Average Full Time	Average Part Time	Average Total Staff
All Television	32	4	36
Four Network Affiliates	35	4	39
ADI 1-25	67	6	73
ADI 26-50	45	4	49
ADI 51-100	35	4	39
ADI 101-150	24	3	27
ADI 151+	15	3	18

Over the last five years, the number of full time news staffers has moved up from 27 to 32, although the number of part-timers has slid from five to four. Over that time frame, all market sizes have grown except the smallest. The number of newspeople in markets 151+ has actually dropped—primarily because of a decrease in the number of part-timers. The largest TV newsroom in the survey: 138 people.

Hour of Local TV News Per Day

	Weekday Median	Saturday Median	Sunday Median
All Stations	2.9	1.2	1.1
Four Net Affiliates	2.9	1.2	1.1

ADI 1-25	3.4	1.9	2.1
ADI 26-50	3.1	1.5	1.5
ADI 51-100	3.3	1.3	1.1
ADI 101-150	2.8	1.0	0.9
ADI 151+	2.3	0.7	0.6
Full Time Staff 51+	4.7	2.5	2.5
Full Time Staff 31-50	3.1	1.3	1.1
Full Time Staff 21-30	2.8	1.0	0.8
Full Time Staff 11-20	2.5	0.8	0.7
Full Time Staff 1-10	1.4	0.2	0.2

There has been little change in the amount of news run on weekdays in the last few years, although some of that apparent stagnation comes from stations starting new news operations and, typically, starting with just one or two newscasts. That tends to hold down the figures. Overall, weekend news has clearly grown the most in the last few years. Fox affiliates generally run considerably less news than other affiliates.

Amount of Radio News: 1998 vs. 1997

Increased: 31%
Decreased: 10%
Stayed the Same: 58%
Don't Know: 1%

Amount of Radio News Planned for 1999

Increase: 20%
Decrease: 2%
Stay the Same: 71%
Don't Know: 7%

Over the last few years, there has been a moderate increase in the percentage of stations increasing radio news, up from 26 percent a few years ago to 31 percent now. But there's also a small decline in the percentage of stations planning more news in the future: down from 24

percent to 20 percent.

Radio Staff Size

	Average Full Time	Average Part Time	Average Total Staff
All Radio	2	1	3
AM only	2.3	1.3	3.6
FM only	1.7	0.6	2.3
Major Market	3.5	1.5	5.0
Large Market	3.1	1.7	4.8
Medium Market	1.7	0.6	2.3
Small Market	1.3	0.8	2.1
Single Station	1.3	0.7	2.0
Two Stations	1.4	0.6	2.0
Three Stations	2.1	1.1	3.2
Four Stations	3.2	1.6	4.8
Five or more stations	3.0	1.3	4.3

Overall, radio news staffing has held steady over the last few years. Testing staffing levels by group size, notice that staffing increases from one to two to three to four stations but actually drops slightly beyond that.

Related interesting material for sidebar type stuff:

TV stations don't limit their news to their own stations. Eight percent of TV newsrooms say they run news on another local TV station ... 16 percent say they run news on a cable station ... 41 percent say they run local news on one or more radio stations ... and 52 percent put local news on their Website (although that's well below the 82 percent who report that they have a station Website). There's little variation on which stations run news on radio or have a Website, but markets 26-100 are much more likely to run news on other stations and on a cable channel. Fox

stations are much more likely to run local news on other local stations but are considerably less likely to run news on a cable channel.

Radio use of actualities:

always: 43%
frequently: 26%
sometimes: 19%
never: 12%

Looking at combined radio stations, 94 percent report that there's a sharing of news resources if ownership controls two or more stations in a market, and 78 percent say there's a unified newsroom in that case. One-third of radio stations say they get news from a state or regional network (like Metro or Shadow). Fourteen percent say they get news from a TV station.

Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of radio news directors say they have non-news responsibilities at their station:

Announcing: 29%
Public Affairs: 21%
Programming: 15%
Sales: 9%
Sports: 9%
Farm Editor: 2%
Other: 15%

(There are lots of verbatims that news directors used to describe what the duopoly rules changes have meant to them ... might be interesting to put that together for a side bit in Communicator)

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 1998 among all 1,422 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 994 radio stations. Valid responses came from 793 television stations (55.8 percent) and 188 radio news directors representing 426 radio stations.