

Recession Shrinks TV News Staff

By Bob Papper and Michael Gerhard

The latest RTNDA/Ball State University Survey appears to have captured the industry at the lowest point in the latest recession. The data, collected in the fourth quarter of 2001, shows an overall drop in local television news employment of 14.6 percent from the year before as layoffs and hiring freezes across the country erased many of the gains in the last year before the recession. Still, the numbers are ahead of two years ago, and overall, employment is still up 15.4 percent from 1994 figures.

Hardest hit were the independent stations—down 16.0 percent compared to a 12.5 percent drop at network affiliates.

Overall, there are 733 local television news departments, running news on 834 stations.

For the first time in years, the total amount of news on the air in TV also fell.

The amount of radio news continued to drop, although staff size did not.

TV Staff Size - 2002

	Avg Full-time	Median Full-time	Maximum Full-time	Avg Part-time	Maximum Part-time	Avg Total Staff	Median Total	Maximum Total Staff
All TV	30.7	27.0	120	3.7	22	35.2	31.0	130
Big Four Affiliates	33.6	28.0	120	3.5	22	36.8	32.0	130
Other Commercial	26.2	21.5	85	4.5	14	31.5	31.0	85
DMA 1-25	57.5	48.0	113	5.2	19	62.3	52.0	130
DMA 26-50	45.9	46.5	120	4.1	16	51.8	50.0	124
DMA 51-100	34.9	36.0	77	3.6	18	38.9	38.5	77
DMA 101-150	22.3	23.0	39	3.3	17	25.8	26.0	49
DMA 151+	15.8	14.5	35	3.1	22	19.5	18.0	54

Overall, TV news staff size fell by 14.6 percent from the year before—down 12.5 percent at network affiliates and 16.0 percent at independents. Total staffing remains above all previous years except for the peak reported in the fourth quarter of 2000

Staff Size Changes (2001-2002)

	Increase	Decrease	Same
All TV News	19.2%	54.2%	26.6%
Big Four Affiliates	18.1%	57.1%	24.8%
Other Commercial	35.3%	35.3%	29.4%

While 19.2 percent of stations reported an increase in staff, that's half the level from a year ago, and the 54.2 percent reporting a decrease is more than double the year before. There was an even split among other commercial stations, but the ones that dropped cut a lot more people than the number added by those that went up.

Planned Staff Changes for 2002-2003

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not Sure
All TV News	19.6%	10.0%	56.6%	13.8%
Big Four Affiliates	20.0%	11.4%	54.8%	13.8%
Other Commercial	17.7%	0	64.7%	17.6%

Stations in the South and Northeast are more likely to expect staff increases than those in the Midwest and South, and the larger the newsroom, the more likely staff size will drop.

Amount of News Changes (2001-2002)

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Don't Know
All TV News	28.3%	5.1%	65.8%	0.8%
Big Four Affiliates	27.1%	4.8%	67.1%	1.0%
Other Commercial	52.9%	5.9%	41.2%	0
DMA 1-25	28.0%	4.0%	64.0%	4.0%
DMA 26-50	28.6%	0	71.4%	0
DMA 51-100	19.7%	6.6%	73.7%	0
DMA 101-150	30.2%	6.3%	61.9%	1.6%
DMA 151+	35.7%	5.4%	58.9%	0

While five times as many stations reported increasing news than decreasing, the increase category fell by almost 12 percent from the year before. Almost all of that number went into the stayed the same category.

Hours of Local TV News per Day - 2002

	Average Weekday	Weekday Maximum	Average Saturday	Saturday Maximum	Average Sunday	Sunday Maximum
All TV News	3.25	10.00	1.20	5.00	1.20	5.00
Big Four Affiliates	3.39	8.00	1.26	5.00	1.11	5.00
Other Commercial	3.03	10.00	1.12	4.00	1.06	4.00
DMA 1-25	3.82	8.00	1.74	5.00	1.82	5.00
DMA 26-50	3.67	7.00	1.60	5.00	1.43	4.50
DMA 51-100	3.68	10.00	1.28	3.00	1.01	2.00
DMA 101-150	2.93	5.00	0.98	3.00	0.82	3.00

DMA 151+	2.56	7.50	0.78	4.00	0.75	4.00
Staff 51+	4.97	8.00	2.30	5.00	2.10	5.00
Staff 31-50	3.43	6.50	1.20	3.00	1.10	3.00
Staff 21-30	2.78	4.50	0.94	1.50	0.84	1.50
Staff 11-20	2.60	10.00	0.68	1.50	0.58	1.50
Staff 1-10	1.03	3.50	0.29	2.50	0.26	2.50
ABC	3.39	7.50	1.18	5.00	1.03	3.50
CBS	3.83	7.00	1.50	5.00	1.24	5.00
Fox	2.20	7.00	0.78	3.50	0.90	3.50
NBC	3.49	8.00	1.28	5.00	1.14	5.00
PBS	1.02	2.50	0.05	0.50	0.19	1.50

After generally steady increases, the amount of news actually dropped 5 percent in the most recent survey compared to the year before. The average weekday amount of news fell by 15 minutes; the average amount of news on Saturday and Sunday fell by 3 minutes each day.

TV News Budget ... 2002 vs. 2001

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Don't know
All TV News	30.1%	30.5%	35.0%	4.4%
Big Four Affiliates	29.3%	28.3%	37.9%	4.5%
Other Commercial	43.7%	37.5%	12.5%	6.3%
DMA 1-25	49.9%	16.7%	29.2%	4.2%
DMA 26-50	17.2%	31.4%	51.4%	0
DMA 51-100	25.9%	31.0%	41.4%	1.7%
DMA 101-150	28.6%	32.1%	33.9%	5.4%
DMA 151+	35.8%	34.0%	20.8%	9.4%

The near three-way split among increase, decrease, and stayed the same reflects a significant deterioration from the year before. The 30.1 percent increase is half what it was the year before, and the 30.5 percent decrease is almost three times the level of the year before.

Amount of News Planned ... For 2002 vs. 2001

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV News	26.4%	1.7%	61.5%	10.4%
Big Four Affiliates	27.1%	1.9%	61.0%	10.0%
Other Commercial	12.5%	0	62.5%	25.0%
DMA 1-25	16.0%	4.0%	60.0%	20.0%
DMA 26-50	32.4%	2.9%	50.0%	14.7%
DMA 51-100	19.7%	0	75.4%	4.9%
DMA 101-150	27.0%	3.2%	55.6%	14.2%
DMA 151+	33.9%	0	60.7%	5.4%

The 26.4 percent increase represents a 12 percent drop from the year before. Most of that went to the stayed the same category, with not sure picking up the rest.

TV News Profitability ... 1997 to 2002

	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
Showing profit	54.9%	56%	58%	57%	63%	62%
Breaking even	11.6%	13%	11%	9%	11%	6%
Showing loss	11.2%	10%	11%	11%	10%	8%
Don't know	22.3%	21%	20%	23%	16%	24%

TV news profitability remains high, but there's a clear downward trend in the numbers overall. On the other hand, the latest figures appear a lot stronger than many people might have expected given the economic climate.

TV News Profitability ... by Size and Affiliation

	Showing profit	Breaking even	Showing loss	Don't know
Market size				
1-25	64.0%	12.0%	12.0%	12.0%
26-50	54.3%	11.4%	8.6%	25.7%
51-100	65.4%	12.7%	5.5%	16.4%
101-150	53.4%	12.1%	10.4%	24.1%
151+	41.2%	9.8%	19.6%	29.4%
Full-time staff				
51+	72.5%	10.0%	5.0%	12.5%
31-50	61.0%	11.7%	7.8%	19.5%
21-30	50.0%	8.0%	18.0%	24.0%
11-20	44.4%	13.9%	11.1%	30.6%
1-10	26.3%	21.1%	15.8%	36.8%
Affiliation				
ABC	61.2%	12.2%	6.2%	20.4%
CBS	59.1%	10.6%	4.5%	25.8%
Fox	51.6%	10.5%	20.7%	17.2%
NBC	58.5%	7.6%	11.3%	22.6%
Big four affiliates	58.4%	10.2%	9.1%	22.3%
Other commercial	35.4%	17.6%	17.6%	29.4%

Note that other commercial stations are considerably less likely to be profitable than network affiliates. Otherwise, there are few consistent patterns within the numbers.

Percentage of TV Station Revenue Produced by News

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Not Sure
All TV News	41.0%	40%	0	100%	64.9%

Market size					
1-25	27.9%	30%	5.0%	50.0%	40.0%
26-50	40.4%	35%	17.0%	85.0%	63.9%
51-100	41.9%	44%	4.0%	85.0%	51.6%
101-150	47.0%	49%	12.0%	60.0%	63.5%
151+	42.9%	40%	0	100%	69.9%
Full-time staff					
51+	46.1%	46.5%	4.0%	85.0%	55.0%
31-50	38.0%	40%	5.0%	80.0%	54.3%
21-30	42.7%	49%	11.0%	60.0%	64.2%
11-20	40.2%	40%	5.0%	85.0%	68.3%
1-10	37.3%	12%	0	100%	66.7%
Affiliation					
ABC	42.3%	45%	10.0%	58.0%	58.5%
CBS	49.3%	50%	30.0%	85.0%	57.1%
Fox	20.7%	17%	10.0%	52.0%	64.5%
NBC	42.1%	42%	4.0%	60.0%	64.3%
Big four affiliates	41.7%	42%	4.0%	85.0%	60.5%
Other commercial	35.0%	25%	5.0%	85.0%	57.9%

The percentage of revenue generated by news fell from last year's all-time high—the average dropped from 44.0 percent to 41.0 percent, and the median fell from 45.5 percent to 40 percent. All of the decrease came from top 25 markets

Radio Staff Size - 2002

	Avg. Full time	Median FT	Max FT	Avg Part time	Med PT	Max PT	Avg Total staff	Med Tot St	Max T S
All radio news	1.55	1	12	0.83	1	14	2.38	2	21
Market									
Major	3.28	2	12	1.61	1	14	4.89	2	21
Large	1.72	1	11	1.18	1	8	2.90	1	18
Medium	1.33	1	11	0.76	0	8	2.09	1	17
Small	1.10	1	4	0.34	0	5	1.44	1	9

The average staff size actually rose from a year ago, but the ongoing consolidation in the industry makes it difficult to determine exactly what that means. While the typical news department size rose slightly from last year, the typical radio news department handled news on more stations than a year ago. Even so, the total staff size is still down from two years ago and down 47.1 percent since 1994. Almost half (44.6 percent) of all radio news departments have a staff of one.

Average Minutes of Locally-Produced Radio News - 2002

	All	Major	Large	Medium	Small
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	radio	market	market	market	market
Weekdays					
AM drive	16.33	19.91	12.52	14.77	21.41
Midday	5.62	9.39	3.53	3.99	9.11
PM drive	5.50	6.80	4.45	4.09	8.71
Night	1.58	1.17	2.32	0.95	1.83
Total weekday	29.03	37.27	22.82	23.80	41.06
Saturday					
AM drive	4.61	3.17	3.22	3.87	5.23
Midday	2.09	2.76	1.41	0.87	4.50
PM drive	1.33	2.04	0.91	0.51	2.14
Night	1.30	2.15	1.21	0.52	0.69
Total Saturday	9.33	10.12	6.75	5.77	12.56
Sunday					
AM drive	2.50	4.37	0.72	1.72	3.29
Midday	1.45	2.15	1.06	0.44	2.72
PM drive	1.06	2.15	0.89	0.47	1.12
Night	0.95	1.96	1.21	0.46	0.59
Total Sunday	5.96	10.63	3.88	3.09	7.72

Weekdays, the amount of radio news is down 7.3 percent from the year before (which was down from the year before that). The amount of news on the weekend also fell. All market sizes dropped—except the smallest, which rose on weekdays.

Number of Stations Where Radio News Director Oversees the News - 2002

One	25.0%
Two	24.8%
Three	13.9%
Four	12.1%
Five	10.9%
Six	7.9%
Seven	3.0%
Eight	2.4%
Average	3.1
Median	3.0

More and more, radio news departments handle news on more and more stations. Last year, 47 percent of news directors returning the survey supervised the news on one station only; this year just 25 percent handled one station. Two years ago, 3 percent of news directors oversaw the news on five or more stations. Last year, the number jumped to 12 percent. This year, it's 24.2 percent.

What Else Radio News Directors Do - 2002

Announcing	28.8%
Public Affairs	16.2%
Programming	13.5%
Sports	11.7%
Operations	4.5%
Sales	3.6%
Production	2.8%
Other	18.9%

In this year's survey, 77.4 percent of radio news directors reported they had station responsibilities beyond news—up from 64 percent the two previous years. Interestingly, both programming and operations responsibilities are half what they were a year ago.

Changes in Radio News, Staff and Budget in the last 12 months - 2002

	Increase	Same	Decrease	Note Sure
Total staff	19.7%	69.9%	10.4%	0
Plan to change amount of staff next year	14.7%	74.2%	1.3%	9.8%
Amount of news	38.1%	54.6%	5.5%	1.8%
Plan to change amount of news next year	19.6%	73.6%	0	6.8%
Change in news budget	16.0%	48.8%	8.7%	26.5%

As usual, stayed the same was the biggest winner in changes or planned changes in news, staff and budgets.

Radio News Profitability ... 1997 to 2002

	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
Showing profit	15.2%	17%	25%	19%	22%	23%
Breaking even	13.9%	17%	15%	18%	14%	20%
Showing loss	7.3%	0	7%	6%	6%	6%
Don't know	63.6%	66%	53%	57%	58%	51%

The biggest and most consistent change in radio news profitability is the general trend for fewer and fewer radio news directors to know whether their news makes money.

Radio News Profitability by Market Size - 2002

	Showing profit	Breaking even	Showing loss	Don't know
Major market	5.3%	15.8%	10.5%	68.4%
Large market	10.8%	21.4%	10.7%	57.1%
Medium market	13.3%	11.3%	7.5%	67.9%
Small market	25.0%	9.1%	4.5%	61.4%

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 - 2002

	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	72.8%	61.6%	65.6%	2.0%	29.8%	85.4%
Major market	61.9%	66.7%	57.1%	0	38.1%	90.5%
Large market	85.2%	63.0%	70.4%	3.7%	29.6%	88.9%
Medium market	71.7%	66.0%	71.7%	3.8%	26.4%	90.6%
Small market	69.8%	53.5%	60.5%	0	27.9%	76.7%

The figures are little changed from a year ago, but that could be the result of a change in wording in the question. In the past, we asked about use of digital equipment and new technology; this year we asked about daily use

Percentage of News Material Gathered, Edited and Aired Digitally

	Percent of news gathered digitally	Percent of news material mixed and edited digitally	Percent of news material aired digitally
All Radio - Average	42.9%	54.4%	55.5%
All radio - median	35.0%	50.0%	75.0%
Major Market - average	50.1%	63.0%	55.0%
Major market - median	50.0%	92.0%	77.5%
Large Market - average	42.1%	49.5%	52.9%
Large market - median	50.0%	33.0%	67.5%
Medium market - average	48.9%	56.1%	64.2%
Medium market - median	50.0%	80.0%	94.0%
Small market - average	33.8%	45.7%	45.9%
Small market - median	25.0%	25.0%	27.5%

median			
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This is the first year we've attempted to determine how exactly how widespread the use of digital gear is. Generally, the smallest markets are lower than the others.

Percentage of radio news departments that gather, edit and air news digitally

	Gather some or all news digitally	Edit some or all news digitally	Air some or all news digitally
All radio	75.9%	71.6%	71.1%
Major market	85.7%	80.0%	75.0%
Large market	82.6%	73.9%	62.5%
Medium market	78.4%	74.5%	76.5%
Small market	65.9%	64.3%	66.7%

Percentage of TV News Departments Providing Content to Other Media - 2002

	Another TV Station	Cable TV Channel	Local Radio	Station Website
All TV	17.3%	14.8%	38.0%	68.8%
Big Four Affiliates	18.4%	14.5%	37.7%	73.4%
Other Commercial	17.6%	17.6%	35.3%	35.3%
DMA 1-25	16.7%	20.8%	25.0%	62.5%
DMA 26-50	22.2%	22.2%	44.4%	69.4%
DMA 51-100	18.0%	13.1%	41.0%	75.4%
DMA 101-150	14.8%	13.1%	42.6%	72.1%
DMA 151+	16.4%	10.9%	30.9%	60.0%

Perhaps reflecting the industry constriction of the past year, stations were generally less likely to supply news to other outlets. While the station website figure remained largely unchanged, all other categories dropped from last year—all by about 2 percent.

TV News ... Contracts & Non-Competes

	2002	2001	2000	1999
Percentage of TV News people Under Contract	52.5%	50.2%	44.3%	42.2%
Percentage of TV News people Under Non-Compete	46.5%	43.1%	36.9%	NA

Note that even including photographers and tape editors—two of the groups least likely to be under contract—more than half of the people who work in television news are under contract. Note also the steady rise in the percentage of news people under contract.

TV News ... Percentage Under Contract by Position

	2002	2001	2000	1999
News Director	37%	32%	32%	29%
Asst. News Director	47%	31%	31%	27%
Executive Producer	45%	55%	39%	42%
Managing Editor	52%	54%	33%	27%
News Producer	59%	57%	48%	40%
Assignment Editor	32%	33%	26%	23%
News Anchor	85%	78%	74%	75%
Weathercaster	82%	76%	74%	66%
Sports Anchor	80%	71%	71%	64%
News Reporter	65%	60%	54%	53%
News Writer	9%	21%	7%	11%
News Assistant	5%	14%	5%	2%
Sports Reporter	43%	48%	39%	38%
Photographer	14%	17%	10%	11%
Tape Editor	9%	11%	2%	3%
Graphics Specialist	6%	8%	12%	9%
Internet Specialist	17%	20%	12%	15%

People in most positions are more and more likely to be under contract—with producers and assignment editors showing the highest percentage increases.

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

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	15%	15%
News Anchor	21%	21%
News Reporter	13%	10%
News Producer	10%	10%
Sports Anchor	11%	10%

Almost all of the radio news people under contract are in the largest markets.

Bob Papper is 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.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2001 among all 1,396 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,505 radio stations. Valid responses came from 818 television stations (58.6 percent) and 249 radio news directors and general managers representing 622 radio stations. Some television data result from a complete census and are not projected from a smaller sample.