**TV Staffing and News ... 2009**

**by Bob Papper**

The RTNDA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found that 2008 was the poster child for doing more with less in TV news. All told, 1,200 people in TV news lost their jobs – 4.3 percent of the local TV workforce. Coupled with a decrease in staff, the amount of local news on TV grew to a record amount: 4.6 hours per weekday – up half an hour from the year before.

The pain wasn’t limited to staffing. Average salaries in both TV news and radio news also dropped in 2008.

Hours of Local TV News per Day – 2009 - checked

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average weekday | Weekday maximum | Average Saturday | Saturday maximum | Average Sunday | Sunday maximum |
| All TV news | 4.6 | 23.0 | 1.7 | 7.0 | 1.7 | 7.0 |
| Big four affiliates | 4.7 | 23.0 | 1.7 | 6.0 | 1.7 | 7.0 |
| Other commercial | 2.6 | 7.0 | 1.3 | 7.0 | 1.2 | 7.0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 4.9 | 9.0 | 2.7 | 7.0 | 2.8 | 7.0 |
| 26-50 | 5.2 | 20.0 | 2.3 | 5.0 | 2.2 | 4.0 |
| 51-100 | 5.3 | 23.0 | 1.8 | 4.0 | 1.8 | 5.0 |
| 101-150 | 4.1 | 9.0 | 1.2 | 3.0 | 1.2 | 3.0 |
| 151+ | 3.5 | 6.0 | 1.0 | 2.0 | 0.9 | 2.0 |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Staff 51+ | 6.2 | 23.0 | 2.8 | 7.0 | 2.9 | 7.0 |
| Staff 31-50 | 4.4 | 9.0 | 1.4 | 4.0 | 1.4 | 4.0 |
| Staff 21-30 | 4.0 | 7.0 | 1.1 | 2.0 | 1.0 | 2.0 |
| Staff 11-20 | 2.6 | 5.0 | 0.9 | 3.0 | 0.9 | 3.0 |
| Staff 1-10 | 1.5 | 3.0 | 0.3 | 1.0 | 0.3 | 1.0 |
| Affiliation: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ABC | 4.4 | 9.0 | 1.8 | 5.0 | 1.8 | 5.0 |
| CBS | 4.8 | 20.0 | 1.7 | 5.0 | 1.5 | 5.0 |
| Fox | 4.6 | 9.0 | 1.4 | 5.0 | 1.5 | 5.0 |
| NBC | 5.0 | 23.0 | 1.8 | 6.0 | 1.9 | 7.0 |
| PBS | 1.5 | 3.0 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.3 | 1.0 |

This was the epitome of the year when stations did more with less. Despite shrinking news staffs, the amount of news on the average station soared to a new record – up an average half an hour each weekday to 4.6 hours. Other than independent commercial stations, the growth was largely across the board. Top 100 markets rose the most with only markets 101 – 150 remaining the same. The real dividing line was staff size. Stations with the largest staffs (51+) expanded local news; most others stayed the same or shrank slightly. All network affiliate groups rose, although Fox stations rose a little more than the others. Saturday and Sunday both remained exactly the same at 1.7 hours each.

Changes in newscasts in the past year

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No changes |
| All TV news | 29.9% | 8.5% | 65.9% |
| Big four affiliates | 30.3 | 8.2 | 65.5 |
| Other commercial | 0 | 0 | 100.0 |
| Market |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 31.4 | 14.4 | 62.9 |
| 26 – 50 | 39.4 | 11.8 | 55.9 |
| 51 – 100 | 37.0 | 4.3 | 58.7 |
| 101 – 150 | 26.9 | 7.7 | 69.2 |
| 151+ | 14.6 | 7.3 | 80.5 |
| Staff size |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 41.0 | 13.1 | 55.7 |
| 31 – 50 | 28.3 | 0 | 71.7 |
| 21 – 30 | 27.5 | 9.8 | 64.0 |
| 11 – 20 | 18.5 | 7.4 | 81.5 |
| 1 – 10 | 0 | 25.0 | 75.0 |

Two-thirds of TV stations neither added nor cut a newscast in 2008, but more than three times as many added as cut. Newsrooms most likely to have cut a newscast were the very smallest (1 – 10 staffers). Fox affiliates were the most likely to have added a newscast; NBC affiliates were a little less likely to have added. There were no meaningful differences in cutting back on newscasts.

Two-thirds of the newscasts added were on weekdays, with a slight edge to morning over the rest of the day. The other third was split evenly between weekend and both weekday and weekend. Just over 80 percent of the newscasts cut were on weekdays, with a majority of the cuts in the afternoon.

The most common newscasts added:

10 pm, followed by a tie between 5 am and 7 am, then noon, and then a tie between 7 pm and 5 pm. Few newscasts were cut, and they were scattered across time period, although noon and 11 pm newscasts were slightly more likely to be cut than others.

Amount of News Changes … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV News | 35.1% | 6.5% | 58.1% | 0.3% |
| Big four affiliates | 34.6 | 5.8 | 59.3 | 0.3 |
| Other commercial | 45.5 | 18.2 | 36.4 | 0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 26.4 | 3.8 | 69.8 | 0 |
| 26-50 | 48.9 | 8.5 | 42.6 | 0 |
| 51-100 | 42.7 | 5.3 | 52.0 | 0 |
| 101-150 | 33.7 | 9.3 | 57.0 | 0 |
| 151+ | 24.6 | 4.9 | 68.9 | 1.6 |

Most stations stayed the same, but more than a third increased the amount of news. Although 6.5% is a low number for decreasing news, it’s the highest I’ve seen in the 15 years I’ve been doing the survey. Increases in the amount of news were most likely in markets 26 – 100. Decreases were most likely in markets 26-50 and 101-150. Stations with the smallest staffs were the most likely to cut back on news. Fox affiliates were the most likely to add news and independent commercial stations the most likely to cut. There were no meaningful differences by region.

Amount of News Planned … the next year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 23.9% | 4.0% | 60.2% | 11.8% |
| Big four affiliates | 22.8 | 3.7 | 61.2 | 12.2 |
| Other commercial | 39.1 | 4.3 | 52.2 | 4.3 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 24.1 | 3.7 | 66.7 | 5.6 |
| 26-50 | 19.1 | 8.5 | 51.1 | 21.3 |
| 51-100 | 25.7 | 4.1 | 55.4 | 14.9 |
| 101-150 | 25.6 | 0 | 64.0 | 10.5 |
| 151+ | 23.0 | 6.6 | 62.3 | 8.2 |

The percentage of stations expecting to increase news the next year is well below lat year’s number. But it’s still six times the number that expect to decrease news. Most stations expect the amount of news to remain the same. Interestingly, the smaller the staff, the more likely to expect an increase next year; that’s the opposite of what took place this year. CBS and Fox affiliates are the most likely to expect an increase, and stations in the Northeast are much more likely to expect an increase than affiliates elsewhere.