News salaries stabilize

by Bob Papper

The good news in broadcast news salaries in 2009 is that there isn't bad news, according to the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey. Local television news salaries rose a modest 2.5 percent during 2009, and local radio news salaries were unchanged. That compares with drops for both local TV (4.4 percent) and local radio (1.8 percent) the year before.

With inflation non-existent in 2009 (negative 0.3 percent), news people really did hold their own.

Television News Salaries – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| News Director | $88,600  | $75,000 | $25,000  | $200,000  |
| Assistant News Director | 72,100  | 63,000 | 23,000  | 112,500  |
| Managing Editor | 63,200  | 60,000  | 29,000  | 95,000  |
| Executive Producer | 56,700  | 55,000  | 30,000  | 135,000  |
| News Anchor | 75,100  | 59,000  | 18,000  | 600,000  |
| Weathercaster | 62,300  | 50,000  | 18,000 | 350,000  |
| Sports Anchor | 61,600 | 40,000  | 18,000  | 350,000  |
| News Reporter | 37,400 | 29,000  | 17,000  | 280,000  |
| Sports Reporter | 33,700  | 26,500  | 18,000  | 190,000  |
| Assignment Editor | 40,100  | 37,000  | 20,000  | 114,000  |
| News Producer | 33,600  | 30,000  | 18,000  | 110,000  |
| News Writer | 35,300  | 26,500  | 16,000  | 80,000  |
| News Assistant | 27,900  | 25,000  | 20,000  | 40,000  |
| Photographer | 32,100  | 28,000  | 13,000  | 85,000  |
| Tape Editor | 31,100  | 27,000  | 15,000  | 80,000  |
| Graphics Specialist | 34,900  | 30,000 | 22,000 | 60,000  |
| Internet Specialist | 37,400  | 35,000  | 21,000 | 100,000 |
| Art Director | 66,500  | 55,000  | 25,000  | 120,000  |

A mixed picture in TV salaries. Eleven positions went up from last year; four dropped; three stayed the same. But no position changed much, which is probably the more important point. Overall, salaries rose by 2.5 percent. The only salaries that moved much were reporter, managing editor and art director. All rose by about 10 percent. The biggest loser was sports reporter, which fell by about the same amount. Because the largest, highest-paying stations can raise the average salaries out of proportion, the median -- or midpoint -- is usually considered a better gauge of typical salaries.

Five and Ten Year Median Television News Salary Comparisons 2010 to 2005 to 2000

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2010 | 2005 | 5-Year Percentage Change | 2000 | 10-Year Percentage Change |
| INFLATION |  |  | +13.6% |  | +28.8% |
| All TV news |  |  | +2.9 |  | +17.6 |
| News Director | $75,000 | $73,000 | +2.7 | $59,000 | +27.1 |
| Assistant News Director | 63,000 | 60,000  | +5.0 | 54,000 | +16.7 |
| Managing Editor | 60,000 | 55,000 | +9.1 | 50,000 | +20.0 |
| Executive Producer | 55,000 | 50,000 | +10.0 | 49,000 | +12.2 |
| News Anchor | 59,000 | 55,500 | +6.3 | 45,000 | +31.1 |
| Weathercaster | 50,000 | 50,000  | n/c  | 40,000  | +25.0 |
| Sports Anchor | 40,000 | 40,000  | n/c | 35,000 | +14.3 |
| News Reporter | 29,000 | 30,000 | -3.3 | 24,000 | +20.8 |
| Sports Reporter | 26,500 | 28,000  | -5.4 | 23,000 | +15.2 |
| Assignment Editor | 37,000 | 32,500 | +13.8 | 30,000 | +23.3 |
| News Producer | 30,000 | 30.000 | n/c | 25,000 | +20.0 |
| News Writer | 26,500 | 27,000  | -1.9 | 30,000 | -11.7 |
| News Assistant | 25,000 | 25,000 | n/c | 21,000 | +19.0 |
| Photographer | 28,000 | 27,000 | +3.7 | 23,000 | +21.7 |
| Tape Editor | 27,000 | 25,000 | +8.0 | 24,000 | +12.5 |
| Graphics Specialist | 30,000 | 31,000 | -3.2 | 30,000 | n/c |
| Internet Specialist | 35,000 | 37,500 | -6.7 | 30,000 | +16.7 |

This table gives the longer term picture, comparing salaries with five years ago, ten years ago and with inflation over those periods. Overall, in the last five years, TV news salaries have slipped further behind inflation, growing less than a quarter as much as the consumer price index, 2.9 percent versus 13.6 percent. The ten year picture is better, but overall salary growth, 17.6 percent, still lags well behind inflation, 28.8 percent.

Over the last five years, only assignment editors have kept up with inflation; four positions are unchanged from five years ago; and five positions have actually dropped during that time. Over the last 10 years, only news anchors have kept pace with inflation, although news directors and assignment editors are close.

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 – 25 | 26 – 50 | 51 – 100 | 101-150 | 150+ |
| News Director | $150,000 | $130,000  | $90,000  | $74,000  | $55,000  |
| Assistant News Director | 112,500  | 90,000  | 60,000  | 41,000  | 45,000  |
| Managing Editor | 90,000  | 66,000  | 50,000  | 55,000  | 30,000  |
| Executive Producer | 85,000  | 60,000  | 49,000  | 47,500  | 38,000  |
| News Anchor | 117,500  | 100,000  | 70,000  | 53,300  | 35,500  |
| Weathercaster | 117,500  | 89,500  | 60,000  | 45,000  | 33,500  |
| Sports Anchor | 100,000  | 100,000  | 50,000  | 35,500  | 30,000  |
| News Reporter | 65,000  | 47,500  | 34,000  | 25,000  | 22,000 |
| Sports Reporter | 42,000  | 50,000  | 30,000  | 25,000  | 22,000  |
| Assignment Editor | 53,800  | 42,500  | 40,000  | 32,000  | 30,000  |
| News Producer | 55,000  | 41,500  | 32,000  | 26,500  | 24,000  |
| News Writer | 42,000  | 28,000  | 24,500  | 23,500  | \*  |
| News Assistant | 30,000  | 33,500  | 25,000  | 24,500  | 15,000  |
| Photographer | 50,000  | 40,000  | 30,000  | 23,000  | 22,000  |
| Tape Editor | 55,000  | 34,000  | 25,000  | 20,000  | 18,500  |
| Graphics Specialist | 33,500  | 52,500  | 28,000  | 35,000  | 23,000  |
| Internet Specialist | 53,000  | 40,000  | 36,000  | 34,000  | 25,500 |
| Art Director | 120,000  | 67,500  | 40,000  | 37,500  | \*  |

\*Insufficient data

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the salary. The top 25 market salaries would be even higher, but it also includes a number of smaller, independent newsrooms which generally pay lower salaries than their network-affiliated counterparts. Of all the positions in TV news, only two went up in median salary in every market size: assignment editor and photographer. News producer, tape editor and internet specialist came close. In most years, some market sizes fare better -- or worse -- than others. This year, there's surprisingly little difference from one market size to the next, although, overall, markets 101 - 150 fared just slightly better than the others.

Median TV News Salaries by Staff Size – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 51+ | 31-50 | 21-30 | 11-20 | 1-10 |
| News Director | $133,500 | $85,000 | $65,000  | $55,000  | $49,000 |
| Assistant News Director | 91,000  | 48,500  | 42,000  | 40,000  | \*  |
| Managing Editor | 70,000  | 60,000  | 50,000  | 60,000  | \*  |
| Executive Producer | 65,000  | 50,000  | 40,000  | 40,000 | 30,000 |
| News Anchor | 101,000  | 60,000  | 50,000  | 36,300  | 24,500 |
| Weathercaster | 94,000  | 57,500  | 40,500  | 35,000 | 25,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 90,000  | 45,000  | 34,500  | 30,000  | 23,500  |
| News Reporter | 54,500  | 32,500  | 22,900  | 23,900  | 23,500  |
| Sports Reporter | 43,500  | 30,000  | 23,800  | 21,000  | 25,000  |
| Assignment Editor | 41,000  | 39,000  | 30,000  | 29,000  | \*  |
| News Producer | 41,000  | 30,000  | 25,900 | 25,000  | 35,000 |
| News Writer | 29,000  | 22,500  | 24,500 | \*  | \*  |
| News Assistant | 34,000  | 25,000  | 17,500  | \*  | 21,800  |
| Photographer | 40,000  | 27,800  | 23,000  | 25,500  | 20,000  |
| Tape Editor | 33,500  | 25,000  | 20,500  | 19,000  | \*  |
| Graphics Specialist | 45,000  | 29,000  | 27,000  | 27,000  | \*  |
| Internet Specialist | 42,500  | 35,000  | 28,000  | 25,500  | \*  |
| Art Director | 75,000  | 30,000  | 40,000  | 35,000 | \* |

\*Insufficient data

Usually, when I break down salaries by staff size, I see some pattern of differences with salaries going up and down. Not this year. If there's a pattern, it's the uniformity of the small changes in salaries, regardless of how they're broken down. And not a single job moved either uniformly up or down across all staff sizes. With rare exception, the bigger the newsroom, the bigger the salaries -- as always. There are no meaningful differences based on network affiliation. Salaries in the Northeast and West tended to be higher than the South and Midwest.

Radio News Salaries – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| News Director | $37,300  | $32,000  | $19,200  | $65,000 |
| News Reporter | 29,500  | 30,000  | 20,000  | 46,000  |
| News Anchor | 33,500  | 34,000  | 15,000  | 60,000  |
| News Producer | 31,100  | 30,000  | 20,000  | 45,000  |
| Sports Anchor | 33,300  | 28,000  | 20,000  | 40,000  |
| Sports Reporter | 21,000  | 29,000  | 20,000  | 40,000  |

Overall, radio news salaries were unchanged in 2009. News directors rose slightly. News reporters, producers and sports reporters rose, but news and sports anchors fell. Because the largest, highest-paying stations can raise the average salaries out of proportion, the median -- or midpoint -- is usually considered a better gauge of typical salaries.

Five and Ten Year Median Radio News Salary Comparisons 2010 to 2005 to 2000

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2010  | 2005  | 5-Year Percentage Change | 2000 | 10-Year Percentage Change |
| INFLATION |  |  | +13.6% |  | +28.8% |
| All radio news |  |  | +5.2 |  | +25.2 |
| News Director | $32,000 | $33,000 | -3.0 | $24,000 | +33.3 |
| News Reporter | 30,000 | 24,500 | +22.4 | 20,000 | +50.0 |
| News Anchor | 34,000 | 26,000 | +30.8 | 28,000 | +21.4 |
| News Producer | 30,000 | 38,000 | -21.1 | 26,000 | +15.4 |
| Sports Anchor | 28,000 | 27,000 | +3.7 | 25,000 | +12.0 |
| Sports Reporter | 29,000 | 25,500 | +13.7 | \* | \* |

\*Insufficient data

Overall, local radio news salaries have risen less than half as fast as the rate of inflation, 5.2 percent versus 13.6 percent. Over the last 10 years, radio news salaries are much closer to the inflation rate, although still falling behind. In some years, the numbers reported for some positions are fairly low, so I'd recommend looking at the overall figures rather than comparing position by position.

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Major | Large | Medium | Small |
| News Director | $53,500 | $40,000 | $30,500  | $32,000  |
| News Reporter | 35,000  | 40,000  | 29,000  | 25,000  |
| News Anchor | 39,500  | 50,000  | 28,000  | 24,000  |
| News Producer | 40,500  | 32,000  | 29,000  | 24,000  |
| Sports Anchor | \* | 26,000  | 29,000  | 27,000  |
| Sports Reporter | \*  | \*  | 15,500  | 32,000 |

\*Insufficient data

As usual, the larger the market, generally, the higher the salary. Major markets are those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are those from 250,000 to 1 million; medium markets are from 50,000 to 250,000; and small markets have fewer than 50,000 listeners.

Median Radio News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | One | Two | Three or 4 | 5 or more |
| News Director | $27,500  | $32,000  | $33,000 | $43,500  |
| News Reporter | \*  | 25,000  | 28,000 | 35,000  |
| News Anchor | 42,000  | 32,500  | 29,000 | 35,000  |
| News Producer | 43,000  | 25,000  | 24,500 | 35,000  |
| Sports Anchor |  \*  | 27,000  | 24,000 | 37,000  |
| Sports Reporter | \* | \*  | 29,000 | 17,000  |

\*Insufficient data

The salaries by staff size are almost always highly variable, although there is a general tendency for the largest news operations to pay more.

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations News Director Supervises – 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | One | 2-3 | Four  | 5-6 | 7 or more |
| News Director | $27,500  | $32,000 | $25,000 | $31,500 | $40,000  |
| News Reporter | 30,000  | 35,000  | 25,000  | 26,500 | 20,500  |
| News Anchor | 36,000  | 32,000  | 44,000  | 25,000  | \*  |
| News Producer | 20,000 | 29,000  | 44,500 | \*  | \* |
| Sports Anchor | \* | 28,000  | 18,000  | 37,000 | \*  |
| Sports Reporter | \*  | 15,500  | \*  | \*  | \*  |

\*Insufficient data

As with previous years, there is no consistent pattern to salaries based on the number of stations a news director supervises.

Median Radio News Salaries by Ownership – 2010

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Group-Owned | Independent |
| News Director | $32,000 | $32,500  |
| News Reporter | 25,500  | 35,000  |
| News Anchor | 29,000  | 40,000  |
| News Producer | 35,000  | 29,000  |
| Sports Anchor | 26,000 | 34,000  |
| Sports Reporter | 15,500 | 32,000 |

\*Insufficient data

This year – unlike most years – independent stations paid more than group-owned ones.

***Bob Papper is professor and chair of the Department of Journalism, Media Studies, and Public Relations at Hofstra University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. This research was supported by the School of Communications at Hofstra University and the Radio Television News Directors Association.***

**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2009 among all 1,770 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 4,000 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,355 television stations (76.6 percent) and 203 radio news directors and general managers representing 301 radio stations.

Some data sets (e.g. the number of TV stations originating local news, getting it from others and women TV news directors) is based on a complete census and is not projected from a smaller sample.

[THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL CAN RUN AS A SIDEBAR OR SEPARATELY]

TV news 2010 starting salaries for new employees with no fulltime experience

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Position | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| All TV news | $24,300 | $24,000 | $10,000 | $45,000 |
| News assistant  | 23,700 | 23,500 | 20,000 | 30,000 |
| Reporter | 22,800 | 22,000 | 18,500 | 66,000 |
| News producer | 24,500 | 25,000 | 15,000 | 31,000 |
| Photographer  | 22,600 | 23,000 | 19,000 | 30,000 |
| Assignment editor | 28,100 | 24,500 | 19,800 | 45,000 |
| Tape editor | 23,000 | 24,000 | 18,000 | 25,000 |
| News writer | 25,400 | 27,000 | 15,000 | 30,000 |
| Multimedia journalist | 23,000 | 23,000 | 15,100 | 30,000 |

The positions above are listed in the order of number hired. In fact, news assistant and reporter together represent 70 percent of all hires. News producer and photographer together represent another 15 percent, and the other four positions listed plus a couple single positions not listed make up the remaining 15 percent. Most of the people hired were replacements for those who left rather than new positions.

Radio news 2010 starting salaries for new employees with no fulltime experience

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Position | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| All radio news | $17,000  | $19,500  | $13,500 | $35,000  |
| General news | 18,500 | 15,000 | 20,000 | 35,000 |
| News reporter | 17.300  | 24,000 | 18,000 | 30,000 |
| Operations | 17,000 | 17,000 | 17,000 | 17,000 |
| News director | 19,000 | 19,000 | 19,000 | 19,000 |
| Editor | 22,000 | 22,000 | 22,000 | 22,000 |

The starting salaries in radio are the lowest I've seen in several years. The positions above are listed in the order of number hired. Most of the people hired were replacements for those who left rather than new positions.