**No new record for amount of TV news ... sort of**

**by Bob Papper**

* The amount of TV news remains high
* News directors project more for next year
* Changes in survey questions make radio comparisons difficult

After four straight years of setting new records for the amount of news, the number actually dropped slightly this year -- by 6 minutes per weekday. But the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found the median remained at 5 hours per weekday, and both average and median rose for both Saturday and Sunday, so if you throw in the weekend, then there was a small, overall increase. Call it a semi-record.

Hours of local TV news per day – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average weekday | Median weekday | Weekday maximum | Average Saturday | Median Saturday | Saturday maximum | Average Sunday | Median Sunday | Sunday maximum |
| All TV news | 5.4 | 5 | 37.5 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 24 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 24 |
| Big four affiliates | 5.7 | 5 | 37.5 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 24 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 24 |
| Other commercial | 3.3 | 2.8 | 9 | 1.7 | 1 | 7.5 | 1.6 | 1 | 7.5 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 6.2 | 5.5 | 24 | 3.3 | 3 | 24 | 3.3 | 3 | 24 |
| 26-50 | 5.2 | 5.8 | 10 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 7.5 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 7.5 |
| 51-100 | 6.1 | 5 | 37.5 | 2.0 | 2 | 6.5 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 7 |
| 101-150 | 4.9 | 5 | 11 | 1.4 | 1 | 3.5 | 1.3 | 1 | 3.5 |
| 151+ | 4.4 | 4 | 15 | 1.0 | 1 | 3.5 | 0.9 | 1 | 3 |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Staff 51+ | 7.6 | 6.5 | 37.5 | 3.3 | 3 | 7.5 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 7.5 |
| Staff 31-50 | 5.6 | 5 | 11 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 4 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 5.5 |
| Staff 21-30 | 4.4 | 4 | 7.5 | 1.3 | 1 | 3.5 | 1.2 | 1 | 3.5 |
| Staff 11-20 | 3.9 | 3.5 | 15 | 0.8 | 1 | 2 | 0.8 | 1 | 2 |
| Staff 1-10 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 15 | 0.3 | 0 | 1 | 0.2 | 0 | 1 |
| Affiliation: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ABC | 5.4 | 5 | 25 | 2.4 | 2 | 24 | 2.3 | 1.5 | 24 |
| CBS | 5.5 | 5.5 | 15 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 5 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 5.5 |
| Fox | 6.6 | 6.5 | 11.5 | 1.8 | 1 | 5 | 2.0 | 1 | 5 |
| NBC | 5.8 | 5 | 37.5 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 6.5 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 7 |
| PBS | 1.5 | 1.5 | 3 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 | 0 | 1 |

Generally, the bigger the market and the bigger the news staff, the more news a station is likely to run.

Saturday and Sunday news time rose an average of 12 and 6 minutes each, respectively. But the median number went up by half an hour each day. Over 40% of all TV stations say they increased the amount of news that they run, and few stations report cutting back.

Amount of news changes … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV News | 41.2% | 2.7% | 55.8% | 0.3% |
| Big four affiliates | 42.5 | 1.7 | 55.4 | 0.3 |
| Other commercial | 33.3 | 8.3 | 58.3 | 0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 51.7 | 3.3 | 45.0 | 0 |
| 26-50 | 39.2 | 3.9 | 56.9 | 0 |
| 51-100 | 40.5 | 4.8 | 54.8 | 0 |
| 101-150 | 39.5 | 0 | 59.2 | 1.3 |
| 151+ | 35.1 | 1.8 | 63.2 | 0 |

The percentage of stations that reported increasing the amount of news fell about 4 points from last year, and the percentage reporting a decrease increased by just over one. Cutbacks were most common among the smallest newsrooms (1 - 10 staffers) and stations not affiliated with one of the four major networks. But if over 40% of stations reported increasing news, why is there less weekday news now than the year before? First, it's not the same stations reporting every year, so even though participation rates are high, I don't track the exact same stations from one year to the next. And this year, there are noticeably fewer stations reporting 10 and more hours per day. It just happens.

Changes in newscasts in the past year

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No change |
| All TV news | 36.8% | 6.0% | 59.7% |
| Big four affiliates | 38.6 | 5.6 | 58.3 |
| Other commercial | 20.0 | 5.0 | 75.0 |
| Market |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 49.1 | 11.8 | 47.1 |
| 26 – 50 | 36.4 | 6.8 | 59.1 |
| 51 – 100 | 36.6 | 6.2 | 58.5 |
| 101 – 150 | 32.4 | 2.8 | 66.2 |
| 151+ | 30.8 | 3.8 | 65.4 |
| Staff size |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 47.6 | 8.1 | 50.0 |
| 31 – 50 | 41.2 | 4.5 | 55.9 |
| 21 – 30 | 29.3 | 1.7 | 69.0 |
| 11 – 20 | 31.1 | 6.7 | 64.4 |
| 1 – 10 | 0 | 15.8 | 84.2 |

There was a nearly 6 point drop in the percentage of stations adding a newscast, with no major differences based on affiliation. Stations in the South were more likely to add a newscast than others. The percentage of stations cutting a newscast nearly doubled from the year before -- especially in the largest markets and at the smallest shops. Still, it's a small number.

Almost 37% of news directors said they added a newscast in 2012, and almost all of them listed when they added. The big winner was weekend mornings. Over 20% of the news directors who added newscasts listed Saturday morning, Sunday morning or both. And almost 20% noted some time Saturday or Sunday evening (or both). Next came the early morning on weekdays, with the 4 am hour and 5 am hour each getting about 10% of all the additions. After that, additions were all across the board., In fact, the only times NOT seeing new newscasts were 9 am - 11 am, 1 pm - 4 pm and 8 pm - 9 pm. Otherwise, every hour from 4 am to midnight saw at least some new newscasts.

In contrast, only 6% of TV news directors said they cut a newscast. Almost 20% of that group said they cut back a noon newscast from an hour to a half hour. Otherwise, the cuts were just a random newscast somewhere in the schedule. Note that the percentages above do not necessarily add up to 100% because the same station may have both added and cut a newscast.

Amount of news planned … the next year - 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 29.9% | 0 | 60.7% | 9.5% |
| Big four affiliates | 29.4 | 0 | 61.8 | 8.9 |
| Other commercial | 44.0 | 0 | 44.0 | 12.0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 26.2 | 0 | 67.2 | 6.6 |
| 26-50 | 32.0 | 0 | 56.0 | 12.0 |
| 51-100 | 36.9 | 0 | 56.0 | 7.1 |
| 101-150 | 24.7 | 0 | 61.0 | 14.3 |
| 151+ | 28.6 | 0 | 64.3 | 7.1 |

As far as amount of news planned, overall, there's not much change in these numbers from a year ago, but that overall figure hides two significant differences. The percentage of other commercial stations (not ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC) planning to increase news this year is up 16 points over last year. That's the plus side. But the percentage of stations in top 25 markets that expect to increase news is down more than 10 points from a year ago. We'll see how that all comes out next year.

**Radio News**

I wish I could provide a clear picture of the amount of radio news this year versus years past, but I can't. It's been clear for a while that different radio news directors were answering the question about amount of news in different ways -- or not answering it at all because of how long and detailed the question was. For two years now, I've tried to streamline and simplify the question. I switched from asking for data from each station by daypart to asking for just weekday and Saturday and Sunday totals; and I've switched from asking hours of news to asking minutes of news.

Hopefully, all of these changes have resulted in better numbers, but the changes themselves have made comparisons with the past largely impossible. We'll see how this year's numbers compare to next year's.

Overall in the survey, 77.7% of radio stations run local news -- 78.8% of AM stations and 77.2% of FM stations. The overall percentage is up a surprising 8.8 from last year, with AM stations up 9.8 points and FM stations up 4. As I do each year, I would urge caution on those numbers. The numbers are based on stations that return the survey, and since it's a news survey, stations that run news could well be more likely to return the surveys than stations that do not. It's possible those percentages are too high.

Average and median minutes -hours of locally-produced radio news – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weekday average | Weekday median | Saturday average | Saturday median | Sunday average | Sunday median |
| All radio | 101.2 | 60.0 | 26.5 | 0 | 19.4 | 0 |
| Major market | 120.1 | 95.0 | 28.7 | 0 | 28.8 | 0 |
| Large market | 93.0 | 32.0 | 18.8 | 0 | 14.1 | 0 |
| Medium market | 131.3 | 60.0 | 36.3 | 1.5 | 21.3 | 0 |
| Small market | 60.1 | 49.0 | 18.5 | 4.5 | 15.6 | 0 |

Not surprisingly, more staff meant more news. So did more stations in a group. There was no consistent pattern by geography, although stations in the West tended to do a little less news than others. Note that these numbers represent amount of news per newsroom -- not news per station.

Changes in radio news in the last 12 months and planned for the future – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Amount of news the past year | 22.0% | 6.7% | 70.1% | 1.2% |
| Plan to change amount of news next year | 12.7 | 1.2 | 80.6 | 5.5 |

Historically, these numbers have tended to be pretty consistent, but this year is different. The percentage of stations reporting an increase in news fell from 30.1% last year to 22% this time around. The percentage reporting a drop edged up from 4.9% to 6.7%. Non-commercial stations were a little more likely to increase the amount of news; so were stations in the biggest markets.

Half as many radio news directors expect to increase news this year as expected to increase news a year ago -- down from last year's 25.4% to this year's 12.7%. There were no meaningful differences by subgroup (staff size, ownership, number of stations, etc.

About one in five (21.8%) news directors reported adding a newscast last year. That's almost identical to the previous year. Mornings expanded more than any other area, but even the exact times in the morning varied quite a bit.

One in ten news directors reported cutting a newscast last year. That's just about the same as last year's 10.2% figure. Those cuts tended not to concentrate in any particular daypart more than another.

Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2013

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| No. of Stations | Percentage |
| One | 40.0 |
| Two | 25.7 |
| Three | 11.4 |
| Four | 8.0 |
| Five | 6.9 |
| Six+ | 8.0 |
| Overall | Number |
| Average | 2.6 locally |
| Median | 2 |
| Maximum | 14 locally + 30 elsewhere |

The numbers here are sharply different from past years, with a huge spike in the percentage of news directors saying they oversee the news on just one station. However, the phrasing of the question changed this year, so a direct comparison is risky. It could be that I simply heard from more news directors at single stations, but it could also be a different interpretation by respondent news directors. I should know the answer next year.

Where more than one related station ran news in a market, 80% had a centralized newsroom. That's up almost 2 points from last year to its highest level ever.

What else radio news directors do – 2013

This year, 64.5% of radio news directors said they had other responsibilities at the station beyond news. That's down from last year and the year before and well below the all time record of 83.1% five years ago. But I also cracked down on what constituted "beyond news," since a lot of the answers looked like the usual things that I remember considering part of the job when I worked in radio news. The smaller the market, the more likely for a news director to have other responsibilities.

What else radio news directors do?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Other job | Percentage |
| Announcing | 28.9% |
| Sports | 17.8 |
| General Manager | 16.7 |
| Program Director | 14.4 |
| Public Affairs | 12.2 |
| Promotions | 11.1 |
| Production | 11.1 |
| Operations | 11.1 |
| News Anchor | 10.0 |
| x Sales | 7.8 |
| Other | 6.7 |
| Web | 6.7 |
| Talk show host | 5.6 |
| Education | 5.3 |

Sports and announcing swapped positions from a year ago, but otherwise, most of the numbers are fairly similar.

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2012 among all 1,732 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,000 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,377 television stations (79.5%) and 217 radio news directors and general managers representing 575 radio stations.

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