**TV news employment stagnates ... radio news plods along as usual ... 2013**

**by Bob Papper**

* TV news employment holds steady
* The average TV staff size goes up, but the number of newsrooms falls
* Radio news little changed ... as usual

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found lots of staff turnover, but when the dust settled, the total TV staffing was virtually unchanged from a year ago -- down just 48 to a total local TV news staff of 27,605. The average staff size per newsroom actually grew to break last year's record, but, once again, fewer newsrooms resulted in that slight overall shrinkage. It's still the third highest total staff ever (barely behind both 2000 and last year).

Overall, there are now 717 TV stations originating local news ... running that news on those stations and another 235 stations ... for a total of 952 stations airing local news. That's down eight stations originating news from last year's 725, and they're running news on seven fewer additional stations than last year. Most of the stations that stopped originating local news are involved in some form of consolidation (so they're still running news), but some other stations that got news from elsewhere dropped local news completely.

The number of stations originating local news peaked in 2005 at 778. It's been steadily down since then. Some of those were marginal operations to begin with, but quite a few TV newsrooms have been subsumed in some sort of consolidation or shared services agreement. We're now losing TV newsrooms at the fairly steady rate of eight per year. Until this year, the number of stations getting news from one of those originating stations has been growing. This is the first year that list has gotten smaller. I'll have to see if that's also a trend.

In contrast, the latest numbers from the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) found that newspaper newsroom staff fell 6.4% from a year ago. That's approaching three times the previous year's drop of 2.4%. That takes the total daily newspaper news staff down from last year's record low of 40,600 to a new record low of 38,000, spread among nearly 1,400 newspapers (twice the number of local TV newsrooms). The average U.S. daily newspaper now has 27.5 news staffers; the average local TV news staff is 38.5.

The average TV station hired 5.6 replacements during 2012 and .90 new, additional positions. Replacements are up 0.2, but new hires are down 0.6 from a year ago.

Top replacement hires:

1. Reporters ... well ahead of #2.

2. Producers ... well ahead of #3.

3. Photographers ... well ahead of #4.

4. Anchors ... at double #5.

5. MMJs ... well ahead of #6.

6. Weather

7. Video editors and assignment desk (tied) ... about double #9.

9. A tie among: writer, sports anchor, executive producer, other news manager, web producer and anchor/reporter.

The only meaningful difference in that list compared to last year is that AP (associate or assistant producer/news assistant) virtually disappeared from the list this year.

Top new hires:

1. Reporter and producer (tied) ... well ahead of #3.

3. Anchor ... barely ahead of #4.

4. MMJ, photographer and web producer (tied) ... double #7.

7. AP and weather (tied).

9. Barely showing up, but it's executive producer and digital content manager

There are more differences among new hires this year versus last. Web hires dropped this year, along with tape editors and APs. MMJs rose from a year ago.

TV staff size – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Avg full-time | Median full-time | Maximum full-time | Avg part-time | Median part-time | Maximum part-time | Avg total staff | Median total | Maximum total staff |
| All TV | 38.5  | 31  | 136  | 4.9  | 2  | 130  | 43.1  | 34  | 175  |
| Big four affiliates | 40.9  | 33  | 136  | 5.2  | 2  | 130  | 45.6  | 36  | 175  |
| Other commercial  | 25.3  | 18  | 107  | 4.3  | 3  | 19  | 27.2  | 20.5  | 86  |
| Non-commercial | 7.6  | 7  | 23 | 0.9  | 0  | 3 | 9.3  | 8  | 23 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 67.7  | 76  | 136  | 9.1  | 4  | 50  | 76.0  | 82  | 175  |
| 26-50 | 51.0  | 55  | 102  | 4.2  | 3  | 13  | 57.1 | 61  | 107  |
| 51-100 | 40.1  | 39  | 85  | 4.3  | 3  | 20  | 43.3  | 42  | 100  |
| 101-150 | 25.8  | 25  | 47  | 5.1  | 2 | 130  | 31.2  | 29  | 145  |
| 151+ | 19.1  | 19  | 34  | 2.9  | 1 | 32  | 22.7  | 22.5  | 47  |

The average full time staff rose slightly this year, but the median full time staff dropped by one. Overall, most market sizes held fairly steady in the last year.

Staff size changes … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Don’t know |
| All TV news | 44.8% | 8.5%  | 46.4%  | 0.3% |
| Big four affiliates | 45.4  | 7.8  | 46.4  | 0.3  |
| Other commercial | 36.0  | 12.0  | 52.0  | 0  |

Generally, the bigger the station, the more likely it was to get even bigger. ABC and NBC affiliates were a little more likely to grow than CBS or Fox affiliates. Stations in the Northeast were most likely to grow, followed by the Midwest ... with the South and West lagging behind.

Planned staff changes … the next year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 34.7%  | 2.5%  | 54.0%  | 8.9%  |
| Big four affiliates | 34.7  | 2.4  | 54.6  | 8.2  |
| Other commercial | 40.0  | 4.0  | 44.0  | 12.0  |

Two-thirds of the biggest stations and two-thirds of the top 25 market stations expected little or no change in staff this year. Fox affiliates were the most likely to expect growth in the next 12 months, but that was also true last year -- even though it didn't work out that way. Stations in the South were the most likely to expect growth, and stations in the Northeast were the least likely.

TV news budget … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Don’t know |
| All TV news | 48.8%  | 5.7%  | 38.5%  | 7.0%  |
| Big four affiliates | 50.7  | 5.6  | 36.7  | 7.0  |
| Other commercial | 31.6  | 10.5  | 57.9  | 0  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 38.5  | 7.7  | 48.1  | 5.8  |
| 26-50 | 54.5  | 2.3  | 31.8  | 11.4  |
| 51-100 | 50.6  | 7.4  | 39.5  | 2.5  |
| 101-150 | 52.9  | 4.3  | 37.1  | 5.7 |
| 151+ | 46.2  | 5.8  | 34.6  | 13.5  |

The percentage of stations with bigger news budgets rose more than 10 points in the last year, and the percentage of stations with a lower budget fell by 11. All of that increase went to network affiliates. Stations in the Northeast generally fared the best, while stations in the West lagged behind.

TV news profitability … 2000 - 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Showing profit | 58% | 44.5% | 47.8% | 57.4% | 59.3% | 65.7% |
| Breaking even | 11 | 24.2 | 14.6 | 9.3 | 7.7 | 4.9 |
| Showing loss | 11 | 12.1 | 8.3 | 6.9 | 3.7 | 4.2 |
| Don’t know | 20 | 19.2 | 29.2 | 26.3 | 29.3 | 22.7 |

The percentages of stations making a profit on news rose to its highest level since 1995, when it hit 72%. The highest I've ever seen was 1994, when profitability was 83%. Missing percentages are non-commercial stations.

TV news profitability … by size and affiliation – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Showing profit | Breaking even | Showing loss | Don’t know |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 72.3%  | 4.3%  | 6.4%  | 12.8% |
| 26-50 | 57.5  | 7.5  | 5.0  | 22.5  |
| 51-100 | 79.7  | 2.5  | 2.5  | 13.9  |
| 101-150 | 57.4  | 5.9  | 4.4  | 30.9  |
| 151+ | 55.8  | 5.8  | 3.8  | 34.6  |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 85.2  | 1.6  | 3.3  | 8.2  |
| 31-50 | 73.5  | 1.5  | 1.5  | 23.5  |
| 21-30 | 64.3  | 8.9  | 3.6  | 21.4  |
| 11-20 | 53.3  | 11.1  | 4.4  | 28.9  |
| 1-10 | 15.8  | 5.3  | 21.1  | 36.8  |
| Affiliation: |  |  |  |  |
| ABC | 69.9  | 2.7  | 1.4  | 26.0  |
| CBS | 63.4  | 9.8  | 4.9  | 22.0  |
| Fox | 70.8  | 4.2  | 8.3  | 12.5  |
| NBC | 71.8  | 2.6  | 1.3  | 24.4  |
| Big four affiliates | 68.5  | 5.1  | 3.1  | 23.0  |
| Other commercial | 57.9  | 5.3  | 5.3  | 31.6  |

Stations with the smallest staffs and outside the big four networks brought the profitability numbers down. They usually do. Missing percentages are non-commercial stations.

Percentage of TV station revenue produced by news – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum | Not sure |
| All TV news | 48.6%  | 46.5%  | 5.0%  | 74.1%  | 74.7%  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 41.2  | 40  | 5  | 70  | 66.7  |
| 26-50 | 51.2  | 51  | 45  | 60  | 80.0  |
| 51-100 | 52.4  | 54  | 25  | 74.1  | 72.2  |
| 101-150 | 45.9  | 40  | 37 | 70  | 77.3  |
| 151+ | 54.6  | 55  | 30  | 68  | 78.7  |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 43.4  | 41.5  | 5  | 74.1  | 59.3  |
| 31-50 | 46.5  | 46 | 25  | 70  | 69.7  |
| 21-30 | 57.7  | 65  | 37  | 68  | 80.0  |
| 11-20 | 50.9  | 46  | 30  | 70  | 82.9  |
| 1-10 | \*  | \*  | \*  | \*  | 94.4  |
| Affiliation: |  |  |  |  |  |
| ABC | 51.1  | 55  | 17  | 70  | 73.0  |
| CBS | 46.1  | 45  | 5  | 70  | 77.3  |
| Fox | 38.0  | 40  | 25  | 45  | 78.3  |
| NBC | 49.5  | 50  | 27  | 74.1  | 67.1  |
| Big four affiliates | 48.2  | 46  | 5  | 74.1  | 73.0  |
| Other commercial | 62.5  | 62.5  | 60  | 65  | 88.9  |

There was a small uptick in the percentage of station revenue coming from news last year. The overall average went up by 0.4, but the median rose by 1.5.

**Radio Staffing**

The typical (median) radio news operation had a full time news staff of one -- the same as it's been since I started doing these surveys 19 years ago. Radio news remains highly centralized, with the typical news director overseeing the news on two stations and 80% of all multi-station operations operating with a centralized newsroom.

Radio staff size – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Avg. full-time | Median full-time | Max full-time | Avg part-time | Med part-time | Max part-time | Avg total staff | Med total staff | Max total staff |
| All radio news | 2.5  | 1  | 23  | 1.8  | 1  | 32  | 4.3  | 2.5  | 32  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Major | 6.0  | 2  | 23  | 2.9  | 1  | 14  | 8.8  | 7  | 29  |
| Large | 3.0  | 1  | 23  | 1.5  | 1  | 10  | 4.5  | 2  | 26  |
| Medium | 2.0  | 1 | 10  | 1.8  | 1  | 32  | 3.8  | 3  | 32  |
| Small | 1.2  | 1  | 7  | 1.4  | 1  | 7  | 2.6  | 2  | 9  |

Most of these numbers for radio aren't simply close to last year -- they're exactly the same. Exactly. Overall average full time, median full time, average and median part time and total staff ... all exactly the same as a year ago. Down to the decimal point. We had fewer extremely large stations in the survey this year than last, but the big picture didn't change. As it has for the 19 years I've been doing this research, the typical (median) radio station still has one person doing news. Typically, non-commercial radio stations have twice the staff as commercial ones. And a group of 2 or more stations in a market didn't change that typical one news person until the group reached six or more stations. At that point, the typical news department had three people in news instead of one

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

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Total news staff the past year | 12.3%  | 8.6%  | 77.2%  | 1.9%  |
| Plan to change amount of staff next year | 10.2  | 0.6  | 82.8  | 6.4  |
| Change in news budget from the year before | 13.8  | 8.8  | 61.3  | 16.2  |

Staff increases were a function of commercial/non-commercial and market size. Non-commercial stations were four times as likely to increase staff as commercial stations, and, generally, the larger the market, the more likely for the station to have added staff. Ownership and group size had little bearing. In fact, if anything, larger groups were a little less likely to add staff than others. There was no pattern to stations planning to increase staff in 2013. Budget numbers are pretty similar to last year ... and the year before, and so on.

Radio news profitability … 2000 - 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Showing profit | 25% | 19.6% | 13.9% | 23.0% | 14.6% | 14.3% |
| Breaking even | 15 | 14.4 | 13.9 | 21.5 | 19.5 | 17.4 |
| Showing loss | 7 | 3.1 | 9.8 | 9.6 | 10.4 | 11.8 |
| Don't know | 53 | 62.9 | 62.3 | 45.9 | 55.5 | 33.5 |
| Non-profit |  |  |  |  |  | 23.0 |

Profitability was a function of market size. The biggest markets were most likely to make a profit on news (20.8%), straight down to the smallest markets at just 8.5%. Number of stations, ownership and region made no discernible difference in profitability. For the first time, I offered news directors an option of non-profit in response to the question. Apparently, I should have done that earlier because it appears that most of those news directors used to answer "didn't know" rather than the more accurate "non-profit."

I've never reported the percentage of radio station revenue derived from news before because so few radio news directors knew the answer. Typically, 80%+ couldn't answer the question. But this year, a third gave an answer. They put average station revenue for news as 6.1% and a typical (median) percentage of revenue at 2.3%.

Radio news profitability by market size – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Showing profit | Breaking even | Showing loss | Don’t know | Non-profit |
| Major market | 20.8%  | 8.3%  | 4.2%  | 20.8%  | 45.8% |
| Large market | 18.2  | 9.1  | 9.1  | 30.3  | 33.3  |
| Medium market | 14.0  | 15.8  | 17.5  | 38.6  | 14.0 |
| Small market | 8.5  | 29.8  | 10.6  | 36.2  | 14.9  |

Major markets are those with 1 million or more potential 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.

As always, it's also hard to project radio hiring based on the survey responses. Only half the news directors answered the question, and there's no way to know whether a non-answer means there was no hiring or whether it's just a non-answer. The median number of hires -- both replacements and new positions -- was zero. That doesn't mean there was no hiring, but more than half the stations reported they hired no one in news. Of those that did hire, they hired an average of 0.3 people as replacements and 0.1 people in new positions. Hard to imagine, but that's noticeably lower than last year. Bottom line: another in a series of weak years for radio employment.

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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.