**The evolving TV news business and new technology**

by Bob Papper

* The big picture of TV news
* New programming in the works by TV news departments
* Where new technologies are heading this year in TV and radio

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey continues to show that the TV news business isn't limited to TV anymore. But the numbers also show a stabilization in the reach of a TV newsroom. More stations are involved in running news on other outlets, but the number of other outlets (per station) is dropping. Here's how you arrive at that seemingly contradictory conclusion. More than three-quarters, 78.3%, of stations provide local news content to one or more other media -- beyond their own station or website. That's up almost 3 points from a year ago. But if you look at the categories of involvement, only one is up from last year. Another local TV station and TV in another market are identical to last year. All the others -- including "other" -- are down. Mobile is the only one that's up, and it's only up by 2 points.

**TV news departments are providing content to a variety of other outlets**

Percentage of TV news departments providing content to other media – 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Another local TV station | TV in another market | Cable TV channel | Local radio | Website not your own | Mobile device | Other |
| All TV | 23.6% | 12.7% | 7.1% | 39.8% | 7.8% | 43.2% | 6.2% |
| Big four affiliates | 24.7 | 11.0 | 7.5 | 42.1 | 7.2 | 45.9 | 6.5 |
| Other commercial | 10.0 | 30.0 | 0 | 15.0 | 10.0 | 25.0 | 5.0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 15.5 | 10.3 | 13.8 | 20.7 | 6.9 | 37.9 | 6.9 |
| 26-50 | 21.3 | 10.6 | 14.9 | 40.4 | 6.4 | 36.2 | 10.6 |
| 51-100 | 28.7 | 12.6 | 4.6 | 42.5 | 10.3 | 44.8 | 5.7 |
| 101-150 | 29.9 | 9.1 | 2.6 | 48.1 | 6.5 | 42.9 | 0 |
| 151+ | 17.0 | 22.6 | 3.8 | 43.4 | 7.5 | 52.8 | 11.3 |

The numbers are a bit more complicated than they appear. Stations in the top 25 markets dropped in every category except mobile devices -- which stayed the same -- and "other," which went up slightly. Running news on another TV station in the same market is more and more something we see in markets 51 - 150, with markets 26 - 50 behind that. Running news on a station outside the market is increasingly something that we see primarily in the smallest markets, 151+.

The small number of "other" was split fairly evenly among a digital channel, other stations owned by the company, a newspaper ... and one that noted closed circuit health news for doctors' offices.

**Stations remain heavily involved in cooperative ventures with others.**

The table above deals with stations supplying news to other media. The next table deals with cooperative ventures among media outlets. Overall, the numbers are just about the same as last year. Still, a majority of stations have a cooperative arrangement with another medium.

Aside from the local or nearby TV station for which you produce news, do you have a cooperative news gathering or coverage agreement with the following?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Another TV station | Local newspaper | Local radio station | Other | No |
| All TV | 22.7% | 25.9% | 22.7% | 3.8% | 47.6% |
| Market |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1 - 25 | 36.8 | 28.1 | 21.1 | 1.8 | 36.8 |
| 26 - 50 | 26.7 | 40.0 | 17.8 | 6.7 | 42.2 |
| 51 - 100 | 17.2 | 28.7 | 23.0 | 1.1 | 49.4 |
| 101 - 150 | 12.2 | 23.0 | 24.3 | 9.5 | 55.4 |
| 151+ | 27.8 | 11.1 | 25.9 | 0 | 50.0 |

This is another case where the overall numbers mask changes within select groups. Overall, none of these numbers moved in a meaningful way. All, in fact, are nearly identical to last year's figures. But that hides a more than 10 point drop in markets 1 - 25 cooperative deals with another TV station ... because the smallest markets and markets 51 - 100 went up. The percentage of stations that are *not* involved in any cooperative venture actually went up in markets 1 - 100 ... but it went down in markets 100+.

"Other" included corporate, newspapers and other websites.

Two years ago, I noted that cooperative ventures had been growing during a down or uncertain economy ... and that it would be interesting to see how they hold up as the economy improves. Last year's evidence suggested that they're shrinking. Another TV station, newspaper and local radio all fell from last year, although not much. "Other" went up slightly, and "no" (not involved in a cooperative venture) rose by 6.5. It's inconclusive this year. Another TV station and local newspaper each rose slightly. Local radio and "other" fell. "No" went up by 0.1.

For those stations that are involved with cooperative agreements, I asked what they were sharing.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Information | Helicopter | Pool video | Other |
| All TV | 85.9% | 15.4% | 36.2% | 13.4% |
| Market |  |  |  |  |
| 1 - 25 | 58.8 | 50.0 | 44.1 | 8.8 |
| 26 - 50 | 86.4 | 22.7 | 40.9 | 4.5 |
| 51 - 100 | 94.9 | 2.6 | 35.9 | 15.4 |
| 101 - 150 | 100 | 0 | 33.3 | 16.7 |
| 151+ | 91.7 | 0 | 25.0 | 20.8 |

This is another area where the overall numbers are little changed, but the details are different. Stations in the top 25 markets dropped noticeably in every category -- except helicopter, which continued its slow but steady rise. Almost all other categories in almost all other market sizes went up -- at least slightly.

For the third year in a row, the percentage of stations not involved in a cooperative venture were less likely to be planning or discussing one. Two years ago, 28.6% of stations not involved in a cooperative venture said they were planning or discussing one. That dropped to 24.8% last year and plunged to 16.0% this year.

Most of the "other" could easily have been listed as "information" or "pool video." It included content ideas, video, packages, web content, and two listed reporters.

**New programming being developed with or by news departments**

This was a new question this year: Other than regular news, is your station broadcasting or developing new local programming to replace syndicated shows? And, if so, what?

Almost three-quarters (72.7%) said no, but 18.4% said they're already broadcasting such shows and half that number (9%) said they were developing them.

This is clearly a top 50 market enterprise among stations with 31 or more news employees, but the development of new shows is reaching other markets and stations. For whatever reason, NBC affiliates are running behind all the other affiliates.

At the top of the new program list: local soft news/lifestyle type shows. Just behind that, regular newscasts -- or at least that's what they sounded like. Farther back: something that sounds mostly like an advertising vehicle, including product placement and paid segments. Also, local sports and some miscellaneous semi-syndicated material. Then it's just a smattering here and there: "news you can use," health and exercise, public affairs, cooking, retirement or senior living, documentaries. Several stations said they're still looking at options or just in development.

**Stations are running less information on their digital channels.**

This has continued to be an area of greater expectation than reality.

Stations running material on another digital channel that news director oversees - 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All news channel | Weather channel | Other | No |
| All TV | 4.8% | 16.5% | 24.4% | 58.4% |
| Market: |  |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 8.0 | 10.0 | 12.0 | 72.0 |
| 26 - 50 | 6.8 | 22.7 | 34.1 | 43.2 |
| 51 - 100 | 5.1 | 24.4 | 26.9 | 50.0 |
| 101 - 150 | 2.9 | 13.0 | 24.6 | 62.3 |
| 151+ | 2.0 | 10.0 | 24.0 | 66.0 |

For the first time, all three digital channel options dropped from the year before. No category dropped precipitously, but it looks like the promise of more channels opening up more options may not be panning out as extensively as hoped, and "no" rose 2.5 points after a 5 point increase the year before. We'll see where this goes.

Half of the "other" on a digital subchannel involved newscasts, news cut-ins, sports programs or weather. Most of the rest involved a wide range of mostly secondary subchannel-type affiliation stations like Bounce TV, MeTV and the Live Well Network ... along with secondary affiliations that stations have with Fox, CW and Telemundo.

Four years ago, quite a few stations expected to be running other operations, including all news, on their extra digital channels. It's clear that many of those plans have either been dropped or much delayed.

**High Definition**

Percentage of stations broadcasting local news in high definition - 2013

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | No |
| All TV | 70.9% | 29.1% |
| Market: |  |  |
| 1 - 25 | 92.5 | 7.5 |
| 26 - 50 | 81.8 | 18.2 |
| 51 - 100 | 82.5 | 17.5 |
| 101 - 150 | 54.9 | 45.1 |
| 151+ | 43.1 | 56.9 |

The rate of growth is slowing, but the percentage of TV stations broadcasting local news in HD rose more than 10 points over a year ago.

**New Technology - TV - 2013**

Maybe stations didn't add much more staff because of all the shopping they have planned for the year. I ask about planned technology purchases every now and then, but I've never seen a shopping list so large and widespread. A third of all stations say they're buying -- or buying more -- live over cellular gear. Well back -- but we're still talking dozens and dozens of stations -- is new field gear. In the few dozen range: new weather software or systems, high definition conversion gear, tablets (usually iPads) and digital editing equipment. Not far behind that: laptops, smartphones, ENG trucks and satellite trucks. After that, it was a little bit of everything -- from servers and character generators to lighting, a helicopter and a drone. And maybe everything in between. Some weren't sure, but only 20 news directors -- not 20%, just 20 -- said they weren't buying anything at all.

**One-Man-Bands - 2013 Update**

Call them one-man-bands, multimedia (MMJ) or backpack journalists -- their use has been growing over the last five or six years, but there was a clear slowdown this past year.

Percentage of TV Newsrooms Reporting Using One-Man-Bands - 2013

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes, Mostly Use OMB | Yes, Use Some OMB | Yes, But Not Much Use | No, Do Not Use |
| All TV | 40.9% | 28.4% | 13.9% | 16.8% |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 11.1 | 25.9 | 22.2 | 40.7 |
| 26-50 | 18.2 | 43.2 | 15.9 | 22.7 |
| 51-100 | 35.4 | 32.9 | 17.1 | 14.6 |
| 101-150 | 54.9 | 26.8 | 9.9 | 8.5 |
| 151+ | 80.8 | 13.5 | 3.8 | 1.9 |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 7.9 | 41.3 | 17.5 | 33.3 |
| 31-50 | 27.9 | 39.7 | 16.2 | 16.2 |
| 21-30 | 58.6 | 20.7 | 8.6 | 12.1 |
| 11-20 | 77.8 | 15.6 | 4.4 | 2.2 |
| 1-10 | 73.7 | 0 | 15.8 | 10.5 |

For the first time in the last half dozen years, there really wasn't any meaningful change in these numbers from last year. Some groups went up and some down, but, overall, the percentage of stations using one-man-bands is largely unchanged from a year ago. The use of MMJ's had been going up about 3 points a year -- until this year. This year, it's flat.

**Radio Technology**

Periodically, we ask radio news directors about the use of digital technology in the newsroom.

Which of the following technologies are you using on a daily basis in the newsroom? 2013

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Digital audio recording | 88.5% |
| Digital editing and mixing | 86.3 |
| Digital or cellular phones | 65.5 |
| Field laptops for editing | 26.6 |
| MP3 | 79.9 |

These figures are not much changed from a year ago. In fact, digital audio recording and field laptops are down slightly, but that undoubtedly reflects the random pool of radio respondents this year versus last. Interestingly, the use of digital technology increases with staff size, but it does not relate to number of stations or even with market size -- although the smallest markets do lag behind all the others. Non-commercial stations tend to run well ahead in the use of digital except for cell phones.

The percentage of news gathered digitally, edited digitally and played back digitally all remained about the same as a year ago ... and all in the 76 to 78 percentile range.

**New Technology - Radio - 2013**

Again, I asked what new technology the station was looking at this year. The easy winner: digital field recorders ... more than double the next two: automation and various software. Those barely edged out studio equipment and then streaming equipment/software. Then it was just random items. Almost 44% said nothing would be purchased (at least as far as they knew) -- which is up noticeably from last year's 38%; 11% said they didn't know. That's nearly double last year's 6.6%

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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.