An introductory note, if you will. 2014 marks my 20th year conducting the

RTDNA (before that, RTNDA) Annual Survey. First at Ball State University and now at Hofstra University. It has been my privilege to do this, and I want to thank RTDNA, Ball State and Hofstra for the support and opportunity to keep this going. Most of all, I want to thank all of you who spend what I know is way too much time poring over the way too many questions that I ask on this survey. Thank you.

- Bob Papper

**For the first time in 9 years, the number of TV stations originating local news goes up ... 2014**

**by Bob Papper**

* The amount of TV news remains near record high
* News directors project more for next year
* Small drop in radio news

The number of TV stations originating local news actually went up by two this year -- to 719 stations. However weakly, that reverses an eight-year trend of fewer newsrooms.

Those 719 TV stations run news on those and another 307 stations ... a record total of 1,026 stations running local news.

For those keeping score by affiliation, here's how those 719 break down:

* 182 NBC affiliates
* 175 ABC affiliates
* 173 CBS affiliates
* 70 Fox affiliates
* 37 Univision affiliates
* 31 Independents (two of which are Hispanic)
* 19 Telemundo affiliates
* 16 PBS affiliates
* 8 CW affiliates
* 5 America ONE affiliates
* 2 This TV affiliates
* 1 MundoFox affiliate

And here's how those 307 stations that get news from another station break down:

* 97 Fox affiliates
* 47 CW affiliates
* 36 MyNetworkTV affiliates
* 35 CBS affiliates
* 29 ABC affiliates
* 21 NBC affiliates
* 16 Independents
* 14 Univision affiliates
* 8 Telemundo affiliates
* 2 MeTV affiliates
* 1 America ONE affiliate
* 1 Retro TV affiliate

Without getting into the whole list, I show no daily (at least weekday) local news on the following affiliates:

* 12 Fox affiliates
* 6 CBS affiliates
* 3 ABC affiliates
* 2 NBC affiliates
* 162 PBS affiliates

For the second year in a row, the average amount of news on local TV dropped slightly from the year before -- down 6 minutes after a 6 minute drop a year ago. But the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found the median remained at 5 hours per weekday, and both average and median remained the same for both Saturday and Sunday.

Hours of local TV news per day – 2014

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average weekday | Median weekday | Weekday maximum | Average Saturday | Median Saturday | Saturday maximum | Average Sunday | Median Sunday | Sunday maximum |
| All TV news | 5.3 | 5 | 35.5 | 2 | 1.5 | 24 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 24 |
| Big four affiliates | 5.5 | 5 | 35.5 | 2.1 | 1.5 | 24 | 2 | 1.5 | 24 |
| Other commercial | 3.8 | 3.8 | 9.5 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 7.5 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 7.5 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 6 | 5.5 | 24 | 2.9 | 3 | 24 | 2.9 | 2 | 24 |
| 26-50 | 5.8 | 6 | 10.5 | 2.9 | 3 | 7.5 | 3 | 3 | 7.5 |
| 51-100 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 35.5 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 6.5 |
| 101-150 | 5.2 | 5 | 21 | 1.5 | 1 | 5 | 1.4 | 1 | 5 |
| 151+ | 3.6 | 3.5 | 6 | 0.9 | 1 | 2.5 | 0.9 | 1 | 2 |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Staff 51+ | 6.5 | 6.3 | 35.5 | 3.1 | 3 | 24 | 3.1 | 3 | 24 |
| Staff 31-50 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 5 |
| Staff 21-30 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 10 | 1.3 | 1 | 4 | 1.3 | 1 | 4 |
| Staff 11-20 | 3.3 | 3.5 | 7 | 0.8 | 1 | 2 | 0.8 | 1 | 2 |
| Staff 1-10 | 1.8 | 1 | 6 | 0.2 | 0 | 1 | 0.2 | 0 | 1 |
| Affiliation: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ABC | 5.4 | 5 | 24 | 2.5 | 2 | 24 | 2.4 | 2 | 24 |
| CBS | 5.8 | 5 | 35.5 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 6 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 6 |
| Fox | 5.8 | 6 | 13 | 1.7 | 1 | 6 | 1.8 | 1 | 6 |
| NBC | 5.4 | 5 | 20 | 2.1 | 1.5 | 7 | 2 | 1.5 | 6.5 |
| PBS | 1.0 | 0.5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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

Overall, the numbers are almost identical to a year ago. The overall average slid by 0.1 per weekday (6 minutes), although the median remained exactly the same. So did both Saturday and Sunday. The biggest markets cut back slightly; the middle markets, 26 - 150, rose slightly or stayed the same; the smallest markets, 151+, fell. Fox affiliates and PBS affiliates were most likely to cut back.

Amount of news changes … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV News | 36.8% | 1.6% | 61% | 0.6% |
| Big four affiliates | 36.3 | 1.8 | 61.3 | 0.7 |
| Other commercial | 50 | 0 | 50 | 0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 40.4 | 3.5 | 54.4 | 1.8 |
| 26-50 | 41 | 2.6 | 56.4 | 0 |
| 51-100 | 34.8 | 2.2 | 62.9 | 0 |
| 101-150 | 41 | 0 | 57.8 | 1.2 |
| 151+ | 26 | 0 | 74 | 0 |

A clear trend is developing. Last year, the percentage increasing news dropped by 4 points from the year before. This year, the drop is almost 5 points. That downward trend is most pronounced in both the largest and smallest markets.

Changes in newscasts in the past year

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No change |
| All TV news | 26.8% | 3.2% | 70.9% |
| Big four affiliates | 28.1 | 3.1 | 69.7 |
| Other commercial | 21.7 | 4.3 | 73.9 |
| Market |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 26 | 4.1 | 71.4 |
| 26 – 50 | 31.4 | 5.7 | 62.9 |
| 51 – 100 | 27.2 | 4.9 | 69.1 |
| 101 – 150 | 29.9 | 0 | 70.1 |
| 151+ | 18.2 | 2.3 | 81.4 |
| Staff size |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 33.3 | 5.6 | 63 |
| 31 – 50 | 39.1 | 4.3 | 58 |
| 21 – 30 | 15.8 | 1.8 | 83.9 |
| 11 – 20 | 18.9 | 0 | 81.1 |
| 1 – 10 | 11.5 | 3.8 | 84.6 |

There was a 10 point drop, overall, in the percentage of stations adding a newscast in the last year -- which follows on the heels of a 6 point drop the year before. The drop was most pronounced in top 25 markets, which fell by 23 points from the year before. Those adding newscasts spread them surprisingly evenly across several time periods. Late news additions (which include 9 pm in Central and Mountain time) led the way, with a number of those newscasts being added to stations other than the news department's own air. Right behind that was Saturday and/or Sunday morning. Almost at the same level: various weekday morning newscasts, especially 4:30 am, and early evening newscasts, especially at 5 pm.

The percentage of stations cutting a newscast dropped by half from a year ago. What few cuts that were made were scattered across all day parts.

Stations neither adding nor cutting a newscast rose by 11 points from a year ago -- and 24 points in the top 25 markets.

Amount of news planned … the next year - 2014

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 36.3% | 0.6% | 48.6% | 14.5% |
| Big four affiliates | 36.4 | 0.7 | 49.1 | 13.8 |
| Other commercial | 42.3 | 0 | 34.6 | 23.1 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 37.5 | 0 | 48.2 | 14.3 |
| 26-50 | 40 | 0 | 37.5 | 22.5 |
| 51-100 | 38.2 | 2.2 | 47.2 | 12.4 |
| 101-150 | 32.9 | 0 | 52.4 | 14.6 |
| 151+ | 34 | 0 | 54 | 12 |

The amount of news planned has turned into a pretty reasonable predictor of future behavior. A year ago, the overall numbers weren't much different from the year before that, but I noted two key differences. First, "other commercial" stations were much more likely to say they expected to increase news, and top 25 market news directors were a lot less likely to expect the amount of news would increase. Both of those things took place between last year and this.

Now, almost across the board, network affiliates are a lot more likely to expect the amount of news to increase in 2014 over 2013. We'll see.

**Radio News**

The median amount of local radio news fell by 10 minutes per weekday from a year ago. The weekend remained the same, with the typical radio station running no local news on Saturday or Sunday.

In cases of two or more stations in a market, overwhelmingly, 85.6%, there is a centralized newsroom handling the news for all the stations.

Overall in the survey, 75.3% of local radio groups reported that at least one station in the group runs local news. In total, 70% of radio stations run local news -- 76.2% of AM stations and 67.1% of FM stations. The overall percentage is down 7.7 from last year, with AM stations down 2.6 points and FM stations down 10.1. As I do each year, I 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 overall.

Average and median minutes of locally-produced radio news – 2014

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weekday average | Weekday median | Saturday average | Saturday median | Sunday average | Sunday median |
| All radio | 78 | 50 | 26.5 | 0 | 21.1 | 0 |
| Major market | 191.7 | 52.5 | 149.7 | 0 | 145.5 | 0 |
| Large market | 58.5 | 40.5 | 5.6 | 0 | 5.2 | 0 |
| Medium market | 73.7 | 60 | 17 | 0 | 6.3 | 0 |
| Small market | 60.1 | 44.3 | 11.2 | 0 | 8.1 | 0 |

Overall, the amount of radio news per week fell from a year ago. Average minutes of news per weekday rose in the largest and smallest markets, but those increases were more than offset by drops in large and medium markets. Median (typical) numbers are probably better gauges of trends, because the number of news or news/talk stations participating the survey can make the averages bounce up and down from year to year; median numbers moderate that influence and give a truer overall perspective. Median numbers fell by 10 minutes per weekday from a year ago. Note that the typical radio station runs no local news on Saturday or Sunday -- the same as last year.

As usual, more staff meant more news. Two or more stations in a local group meant more news, but the amount didn't go up as the number of stations went up -- just that two or more stations had more news than just one station. Commercial stations ran about twice as much local news as non-commercial stations. Stations in the Northeast tended to run more news than stations elsewhere. 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 – 2014

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Amount of news the past year | 19.6% | 5.5% | 73.6% | 1.2% |
| Plan to change amount of news next year | 18.3 | 1.2 | 73.2 | 7.3 |

The amount of news in the past year looks a lot like the year before. Non-commercial stations were much more likely to increase local news than commercial stations. Stations in the smallest markets were less likely to add news than other market sizes.

Plans for this year are similar as well, although a few more stations plan to increase news than a year ago. Again, non-commercial stations are well ahead of commercial stations, but, otherwise, there are no consistent trends.

Changes in newscasts in the past year

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No change |
| All radio news | 16.8% | 8.1% | 77.6% |
| Major market | 25 | 6.7 | 68.8 |
| Large market | 19.2 | 3.8 | 76.9 |
| Medium market | 19.3 | 10.5 | 73.7 |
| Small market | 11.3 | 7.9 | 83.9 |

About one in six (16.8%) news directors reported adding a newscast last year. That's a little less than the year before. The top time for expansion was afternoon drive, but that barely edged out morning drive and midday.

One in twelve (8.1%) news directors reported cutting a newscast last year. That's also a little less than the year before. The cuts tended to be spread all across the board, although afternoon drive and weekend led a close race.

Stations least likely to have added or cut a newscast: those with the smallest staffs, in the smallest markets, and stations in the Northeast and West.

Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2014

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| No. of Stations | Percentage |
| One | 44.6% |
| Two | 23.1 |
| Three | 11.3 |
| Four | 6.5 |
| Five | 7 |
| Six+ | 7 |
|  |  |
| Overall | Number |
| Average | 2.5 locally |
| Median | 2 |
| Maximum | 9 locally + 37 elsewhere |

The numbers here are strikingly similar to a year ago. The average local number is down 0.1, but the median is exactly the same at 2.

**What else radio news directors do – 2014**

This year, 75.7% of radio news directors said they had other responsibilities at the station beyond news. That's up from last year's low of 64.5% -- but still well behind the all time record of 83.1% six years ago.

Interestingly, there's usually some sort of pattern to this -- like the smaller the market, the more likely that the news director has other responsibilities. Not this year. There was no pattern by number of stations, market size, ownership, or commercial vs. non-commercial.

What else radio news directors do?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Other job | Percentage |
| Announcing | 13.9% |
| Sales | 13.9 |
| Sports | 9.7 |
| General Manager | 9.7 |
| Program Director | 9.7 |
| Operations | 9 |
| Production | 6.2 |
| Public Affairs | 4.9 |
| Promotions | 3.5 |
| Producer | 3.5 |
| Talk show host | 2.8 |
| News Anchor | 2.1 |
| Web | 2.1 |
| Engineer | 2.1 |
| Other | 4.2 |

This year's list of other jobs represents one of the biggest single year shifts that I've seen. Announcing stayed on top, but way below last year. Sales soared, moving from 10th place last year into a tie for first. The order is about the same for most of the rest of the list, but there's been a serious flattening of the results so that there's much less difference from one to the next than I usually see.

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2013 among all 1,659 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,263 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,300 television stations (78.4%) and 249 radio news directors and general managers representing 649 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.