**Changing coverage in local news**

**by Bob Papper**

* More investigative, live and weather on TV
* More politics and government, sports and education on radio

Most of the questions in the RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey of radio and TV news involve a quantification of the industry. How many stations? How much news? Salary numbers. But I frequently get asked content-related questions ... questions about the changing emphasis or direction in local news. And every now and then, I'm able to squeeze such a question into the Survey. Like this year's question on changing emphasis on coverage or resources. And this year's survey uncovered a number of changes in both radio and TV.

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TV : Compared to a year ago, are you placing more, less or the same emphasis or resources on:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | More | Less | Same |
| Investigative reporting | 60% | 2.2% | 37.8% |
| Live reporting | 55.7 | 1.5 | 42.8 |
| Weather | 52.4 | 0.4 | 47.3 |
| Politics/government | 36.8 | 5.9 | 57.4 |
| Beat reporting generally | 34.8 | 7 | 58.2 |
| Consumer issues | 34.6 | 4.8 | 60.7 |
| Education | 22.5 | 4.4 | 73.1 |
| Sports | 22 | 9.2 | 68.9 |
| Traffic | 21.1 | 13.2 | 65.7 |

Investigative was the clear winner with 60% of TV news directors reporting more emphasis in that area. That was especially true for the biggest stations, and especially in markets 26 - 100 ... but, interestingly, NOT in the West.

Greater emphasis on live reporting was most likely to be found in markets 51 and smaller, especially at stations with 11 - 30 staffers, and ABC affiliates ... but, again, NOT in the West.

Some might have thought that it would be hard to put more emphasis on weather, but that wasn't the case ... especially in markets 26 - 100 and at stations with the biggest staffs.

Then we have a big drop to politics and government -- which was a bit surprising since: 1)Most stations don't emphasize political and government reporting anyway and 2)We had a midterm election. More emphasis here was most likely to be found in the smallest newsrooms and at Fox and non-commercial stations.

Beat reporting generally was most likely to be emphasized in markets 26 - 100, the biggest newsrooms ... and NOT at Fox stations or stations in the West.

Consumer issues were most likely to be emphasized in the top 50 markets, Fox affiliates, stations in the Northeast ... and NOT stations in the West.

At the bottom of the list: education, sports and traffic.

Education scored highest in the biggest and smallest markets (1 - 25 and 151+), in the smallest newsrooms and at Fox stations.

Sports tended to be LESS emphasized in markets 26 - 100, LESS emphasized at the biggest stations, and LESS emphasized in the West.

Traffic tended to be LESS emphasized in markets 51 and smaller, the smallest staffs, and stations in the Northeast.

"Other" received relatively few responses, but some TV news directors noted more emphasis on science and the environment, then immigration, and then a variety of individual answers like crime, agriculture, features, military, business, race relations, women's issues and positive news.

You may have noticed that stations in the West seemed to have abstained from most of the changes in coverage.

I don't get asked about changing emphasis of coverage among radio stations, but since I asked it for TV, I decided to ask the same question in radio.

Radio: Compared to a year ago, are you placing more, less or the same emphasis or resources on:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | More | Less | Same |
| Politics/government | 31.2% | 4.8% | 64% |
| Sports | 24.9 | 6.9 | 68.3 |
| Education | 21.9 | 3.3 | 74.9 |
| Weather | 18.9 | 3.7 | 77.4 |
| Beat reporting generally | 18.2 | 4.3 | 77.5 |
| Live reporting | 17.1 | 7.2 | 75.7 |
| Investigative reporting | 16 | 5 | 79 |
| Consumer issues | 12.6 | 3.8 | 83.5 |
| Traffic | 6.7 | 11.1 | 82.2 |

TV news directors responded with way more increased emphasis in all these areas than radio news directors -- except two. Politics/government was close to the same (again, it was a midterm election year), and way more radio news directors and general managers noted greater emphasis on sports than did TV.

There were not a lot of meaningful and consistent differences by groupings, but an increased emphasis on investigative issues was more likely in the Northeast. Weather was more likely to be emphasized in the South. Sports was much more likely to get an extra push among commercial stations; and education, not surprisingly, got a bigger boost at non-commercial stations. Generally, stations in the biggest markets tended to score higher in virtually all areas.

The numbers were relatively small, overall, but "other" was a much larger group in radio than TV. At the top: environment, including energy and mining. Next came agriculture, followed by health and cultural. Single answers included crime, features, Native Americans, race, business and persecution of Christians.

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2014 among all 1,688 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,704 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,281 television stations (75.9%) and 316 radio news directors and general managers representing 868 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.