**News director profile ... 2015**

**by Bob Papper**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey of local radio and television news highlights critically important data about the state of the industry. Naturally, then, the most widely distributed article last year involved "a few, largely irrelevant, data points about news directors." So, as in TV and the movies, I'll do it again. Mostly not so meaningless data ... the sequel.

**Age**

The typical TV news director remained in the mid 40s. The average age was 46.8, and the median was 46. That's 8 months older on average and half a year older as a median. And who wouldn't want to age only half as much per year?

In TV, news directors got slightly younger in the biggest markets and a little older in the smallest markets, so there's now no meaningful difference by market size, affiliation or geography, and no consistent differences based on staff size. It's all based on good looks and charm.

News director age by market size

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Market size | Average age | Median age |
| 1 - 25 | 48 | 47 |
| 26 - 50 | 45.8 | 43 |
| 51 - 100 | 47.2 | 46 |
| 101 - 150 | 46.9 | 46 |
| 150+ | 46 | 46 |

Overall, the age ranged from 25 to 72 ... so, apparently, last year's 78-year-old news director either retired or didn't fill out this year's survey.

The average TV news director has been news director at that station for 5.7 years -- although the median was only 3. That's exactly the same as last year, which means that exactly the right number moved in and out in the last year to keep that number from edging up. The longest serving news director at the same station has been there for an astonishing 35 years, but there were several who hit in the low to mid 30s.

The averages varied erratically by market size, but the median tenure for news directors is just 2 years in top 25 markets; 3 in markets 26 - 100; then up to 4 in markets 101+. Medians at network affiliates varied as well. CBS was highest at 5 years, followed by Fox at 4, ABC at 3, and NBC at 2.5. The averages were all about the same for ABC, CBS and NBC stations (almost 5 - 7 years). News director tenure was shorter in the Northeast than anywhere else. Maybe it's the weather.

Just over half (50.8%) of all TV news directors are currently news director at the one and only station where they have ever been news director.

Which means that just under half (49.2%) of all TV news directors have been news director elsewhere before the current station. The average news director has been in that role, somewhere or other, for a total of 9.1 years ... and a median of 7. That's very close to last year. Historically, that prior experience was especially common, not surprisingly, at the biggest stations. But NOT, this year, at the biggest markets.

Radio news directors usually come in a little younger than those in TV, but not this year. Overall, the average age in radio was 48.2 and the median was exactly 50. Commercial station news directors were a little older than those at public stations, but not by much. Counter intuitively, radio news directors in the biggest markets were slightly younger than others, and news directors in the Northeast were noticeably younger than news directors elsewhere. The age ranged from a young 18 years old up to age 84.

Radio news directors have been on the job as news director for an average of 9.4 years, but with a median of 5, it's clear that some long time news directors are bringing up the average. I found multiple news directors who had been news director for 38 to 40 years. And their experience wasn't just at that station. The average radio news director had been a news director somewhere for 12.3 years; the median was 8. But almost two-thirds (62.3%) of radio news directors are news director at the only station they've served in that position.

Men news directors are older than women news directors. The average male TV news director is 48.3 ... with a median age of 48. Women TV news directors average 42.5 years old ... and a median of 41. The same holds true for radio as well. The average male radio news director is 49.7 and a median of 51. The average woman radio news director is 43.1 years of age ... with a median of 45.5. I know what you're thinking, but I tend to believe those numbers because other research that I've done makes clear that women fill out survey research more honestly than men.

**What else radio news directors do – 2015**

For more than a quarter of radio news directors (28.6%), what else they do may include a full time job. That's how many radio news directors said they were not full time employees at the station. Even more aren't full time news directors.

This year, 71.7% of radio news directors said they had other responsibilities at the station beyond news. That's down from last year's 75.7% ... up from two years ago's low of 64.5% -- and well behind the all time record of 83.1% seven years ago.

I noted last year that 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 last year -- or this year either. 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 | 27.7%  |
| General Manager | 27.7  |
| Program Director | 22.8  |
| Sales | 15.8  |
| Sports | 12.9  |
| Operations | 10.9  |
| News Anchor | 9.9  |
| Production | 6.9 |
| Web | 6.9  |
| Public Affairs | 5  |
| Promotions | 3  |
| Producer | 2  |
| Talk show host | 0  |
| Engineer | 3  |
| Other | 5  |

The list shifted quite a bit from last year. Announcing remained on top -- but at double last year's level. GM almost tripled to tie at first place. Program director jumped into a close third. Sales and sports both edged up, but they stayed in about the same relative position on this list. News anchor and web both rose quite a bit and moved up the ranking while most of the others remained about the same.

**Names**

Apparently I continue to have too much time on my hands because I again decided to see what the most common names for TV news directors are (thankfully, I don't have the data to do this with radio news directors). Most common male names for news director:

1. Mike (combined with Michael and the Basque variant of Mikel -- which may or may not be valid) ... same as last year.

2. John (combined with Jonathan and Jon). I gave John #2 this year because it tied with Jim even without Jack, which then makes it a clear #2 (at least based on my arbitrary decision-making process).

3. Tie: Jim (combined with James and Jamie) same as last year.

3. David (combined with Dave ... apparently this is a more formal group, so I listed it after the friendlier, more casual Jim).

5. Bob (combined with Rob, Robert and Robb). I didn't count Robin because who knows about Robin?

There are changes this year after the top 5:

6. Tie: Mark and Matt (combined with Matthew). Note that Matt is a new entry to the top 10.

8. Tie: Scott ... and new entrants Steve and Dan (combined with Daniel).

Dropping out of the top 10 this year: Tom, Jeff, Kevin, Chris and Rick. It's a dog eat dog business.

Most common female names for news directors:

1. On top and new to the list this year: Cathie (and Cathy, Kathy, Kathryn, Kate and Kay ... okay it took a lot of variants, but it's all part of the same basic name).

2. Jennifer (combined with Jenny and Jenna)

3. Tie: Kelly and Susan (with Sue, Susie and Suzanne ... if I added Suh it wouldn't be a tie, but I'm pretty sure the name derivation is entirely different).

5. Karen (combined with Karin).

6. Tie: Julie (combined with Juli) and Sarah (combined with Sara ... a new entry into the top 10 this year).

8. Tie: Andrea, Denise, Heather and Stephanie.

Lori and Bridget have dropped off this year's list.

I have no idea why people found this interesting last year (or why I did this anyway), but since they did, I'm doing it again.

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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.