**The number of TV stations originating local news slides back to 2013 level**

**by Bob Papper**

* The amount of TV news remains near record high
* News directors expect amount of news to hold steady in 2015
* Small drop in radio news

TV couldn't hold on to last year's gain, and the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey shows the number of TV stations originating local news dropped by two to 717. That's what it had fallen to in 2013 after 8 straight years of a shrinking number of newsrooms.

Those 717 TV stations run news on those and another 328 stations. The latter number is a new, all-time high -- up from last year's 307. That puts the total number of stations running local news at a record 1,045.

For those keeping score by affiliation, here's how those 717 break down:

* 181 NBC affiliates
* 173 ABC affiliates
* 173 CBS affiliates
* 70 Fox affiliates
* 36 Univision affiliates
* 27 Independents (two of which are Hispanic)
* 23 Telemundo affiliates
* 14 PBS affiliates
* 9 CW affiliates
* 5 America ONE affiliates
* 2 This TV affiliates
* 3 MundoFox affiliate
* 1 Soul of the South affiliate

Up from last year: Telemundo, CW. MundoFox and Soul of the South.

Down from last year: ABC, NBC, Univision, PBS and Independents.

Staying the same: CBS, Fox, America One and This TV.

And here's how those 328 stations that get news from another station break down:

* 102 Fox affiliates
* 50 CW affiliates
* 41 MyNetworkTV affiliates
* 33 CBS affiliates
* 30 ABC affiliates
* 24 NBC affiliates
* 20 Independents
* 7 UniMas
* 6 Univision affiliates
* 6 Telemundo affiliates
* 2 MundoFox
* 1 MeTV affiliates
* 1 PBS affiliate
* 1 Retro TV affiliate
* 1 ion affiliate
* 1 CNN affiliate
* 1 Canal de las Estrellas

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

* 11 Fox affiliates
* 6 CBS affiliates
* 3 ABC affiliates
* 2 NBC affiliates
* 164 PBS affiliates
* 42 CW affiliates
* 12 Telemundo affiliates
* 11 Univision affiliates

After two years of very small drops, the amount of local news on TV held exactly steady from the year before. Both average time per weekday and median time per weekday. However, the average local news time on Sunday rose by 6 minutes, so I suppose you could argue that total local news time actually went up.

Hours of local TV news per day – 2015

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average weekday | Median weekday | Weekday maximum | Average Saturday | Median Saturday | Saturday maximum | Average Sunday | Median Sunday | Sunday maximum |
| All TV news | 5.3 | 5 | 12.5 | 2 | 1.5 | 8 | 2 | 1.5 | 8.5 |
| Big four affiliates | 5.6 | 5.5 | 12.5 | 2.1 | 1.5 | 7.5 | 2 | 1.5 | 8.5 |
| Other commercial | 4.3 | 4 | 10.5 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 5.7 | 6 | 11.5 | 3 | 3 | 7.5 | 3 | 3 | 8.5 |
| 26-50 | 6.3 | 6.5 | 10.5 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 3.3 | 8 |
| 51-100 | 5.6 | 5.5 | 12.5 | 2.1 | 2 | 6.5 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| 101-150 | 5.2 | 5 | 12 | 1.6 | 1 | 4.5 | 1.5 | 1 | 4 |
| 151+ | 3.8 | 4 | 7 | 0.9 | 1 | 2.5 | 0.9 | 1 | 2 |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Staff 51+ | 6.8 | 6.5 | 12.5 | 3.3 | 3 | 8 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 8 |
| Staff 31-50 | 5.8 | 5.5 | 10 | 2.2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Staff 21-30 | 4.8 | 4.5 | 12 | 1.4 | 1 | 4 | 1.3 | 1 | 4 |
| Staff 11-20 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 6.5 | 0.8 | 1 | 2 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 2 |
| Staff 1-10 | 1.7 | 1 | 10 | 0.1 | 0 | 1 | 0.1 | 0 | 1 |
| Affiliation: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ABC | 5.3 | 5 | 10 | 2.2 | 2 | 7.5 | 2.3 | 2 | 8.5 |
| CBS | 5.4 | 5.4 | 9.5 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 5.5 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 5.5 |
| Fox | 6.9 | 7.3 | 10.5 | 2 | 1 | 5.5 | 2.1 | 1 | 5.5 |
| NBC | 5.6 | 5.3 | 12.5 | 2.1 | 2 | 6.5 | 2.1 | 2 | 6 |
| PBS | 1 | 0.8 | 2.8 | 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 all identical to a year ago. The weekday average and median are both the same. So are Saturday's numbers. The only change is an average increase of 6 minutes on Sunday -- although even there the median remained the same.

Amount of news changes … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV News | 34% | 2.3% | 63.4% | 0.3% |
| Big four affiliates | 33 | 2.2 | 64.4 | 0.4 |
| Other commercial | 48 | 4 | 48 | 0 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 38.3 | 6.4 | 55.3 | 0 |
| 26-50 | 56.1 | 0 | 41.5 | 2.4 |
| 51-100 | 31.8 | 1.1 | 67 | 0 |
| 101-150 | 31.2 | 2.6 | 66.2 | 0 |
| 151+ | 20 | 2 | 78 | 0 |

This marks year three of what's become a steady trend. Two years ago, the percentage of stations increasing local news dropped by 4 points from the year before. Last year, the drop was almost 5 points. This year, the drop is just shy of 3 points. All market sizes except 26 - 50 dropped. Still, overwhelmingly, stations report staying the same. Fox stations were noticeably more likely to have increased the amount of news than others.

Changes in newscasts in the past year

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No change |
| All TV news | 29.3% | 5.3% | 67.5% |
| Big four affiliates | 29.5 | 5.6 | 67.3 |
| Other commercial | 28.6 | 4.8 | 66.7 |
| Market |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 35 | 5 | 62.5 |
| 26 – 50 | 37.5 | 7.5 | 57.5 |
| 51 – 100 | 31.2 | 2.5 | 67.5 |
| 101 – 150 | 28.8 | 6.8 | 68.5 |
| 151+ | 14.9 | 6.4 | 78.7 |
| Staff size |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 37.3 | 5.1 | 61 |
| 31 – 50 | 39.1 | 3.1 | 60.9 |
| 21 – 30 | 16.1 | 6.3 | 79 |
| 11 – 20 | 12.5 | 6.2 | 81.2 |
| 1 – 10 | 28.6 | 14.3 | 57.1 |

The percentage of stations adding a newscast rose slightly from a year ago, with the top 25 markets leading the way. That balances out a year ago, when top 25 markets lagged the rest. Seventy-five stations reported not only adding newscasts but also noted which newscasts were added:

1. Weekday afternoons in the 4 p.m./ hour

2. Weekend mornings (both Saturday and Sunday)

3. A 4-way tie:

mornings between 7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

early evenings between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

4:30 a.m. weekdays

midday

7. A 3-way tie:

weekdays between 6 p.m. - 7 p.m.

weekdays between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m.

weekday mornings sometime between 9 a.m. - 12 noon

The percentage of stations cutting a newscast nearly doubled from a year ago. But the changes weren't across the board. Stations with staffs of 31 or bigger made fewer cuts this past year than the year before. All the smaller newsrooms made way more cuts than the year before. Notice that the smallest newsrooms, 1 - 10 staffers, were most likely to cut a newscast ... but also among the most likely to add a newscast. Tinkering within a narrow band, perhaps.

Only 16 news directors identified specific newscasts cut. While the newscasts tended to be scattered across all days and times, midday slightly edged out the others as the top cut.

Note that fewer stations made no additions or subtractions than a year ago -- almost no matter what grouping you look at. The percentage making changes didn't go up much, but it did go up almost across the board.

Note that added, cut and no change will not add up to 100% because some stations both added and cut.

Amount of news planned … the next year - 2015

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 30.9% | 0.3% | 56.5% | 12.3% |
| Big four affiliates | 30.5 | 0.4 | 56.5 | 12.6 |
| Other commercial | 41.7 | 0 | 45.8 | 12.5 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 23.4 | 0 | 59.6 | 17 |
| 26-50 | 39 | 0 | 41.5 | 19.5 |
| 51-100 | 35.6 | 0 | 55.2 | 9.2 |
| 101-150 | 28.6 | 0 | 59.7 | 11.7 |
| 151+ | 26.5 | 2 | 63.3 | 8.2 |

Historically, the amount of news planned has been a pretty reasonable predictor of future behavior, generally coming in within about 2 points of actual behavior. This year, the percentage of news directors expecting to increase the amount of news has dropped almost 6 points from a year ago -- with top 25 markets leading the way in that decline. There's a corresponding increase in the percentage saying that the amount of news will remain the same. Looks like 2015 is likely to look a lot like 2014.

**Radio News**

Overall in the survey, 79.2% of local radio groups report that at least one station in the group runs local news. That's almost 4 points higher than last year. In total, 66.2% of radio stations in the survey run local news -- 71.9% of AM stations and 63.9% of FM stations. The overall percentage running local news is down around 4 points (3.8) compared to last year -- which was down 7.7 from the year before. AM and FM stations were down about the same amount. Commercial stations ran local news at a much higher rate than non-commercial ones: 82.6% of commercial stations run local news vs. 64.9% of non-commercial ones.

This year, for the first time, I attempted to determine which stations, by format, run local news.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Format | Percent running local news |
| Country | 93.2% |
| AC (Adult Contemporary) | 93.2% |
| News, Talk, Sports | 88.4 |
| Oldies, Adult Hits, Nostalgia | 84.7 |
| Rock and Alternative | 79.6 |
| Religious | 59.1 |
| Jazz and Classical Music | 57.9 |

College, educational, UAC (Urban Adult Contemporary), Eclectic and Other had too few responses to be statistically significant.

As I do each year, I urge caution on all of 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 all those percentages of stations running local news are too high overall.

Average and median minutes of locally-produced radio news – 2015

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weekday average | Weekday median | Saturday average | Saturday median | Sunday average | Sunday median |
| All radio | 75.6 | 50 | 22.8 | 0 | 15.1 | 0 |
| Major market | 129.3 | 45 | 49.1 | 1 | 42.6 | 0 |
| Large market | 35.8 | 30 | 3.1 | 0 | 2.4 | 0 |
| Medium market | 70.7 | 59 | 20.4 | 0 | 11.8 | 0 |
| Small market | 68.9 | 60 | 19.8 | 6.5 | 8.5 | 0 |

The amount of local news on radio looks strikingly like it did a year ago. Average weekday slid by just over 2 minutes per day, but the median stayed exactly the same. Saturday average dropped by about 4 minutes, and Sunday slid by 6. The medians for both Saturday and Sunday remained at zero. In other words, the typical station that ran local news didn't do it on the weekend.

Commercial stations ran more local news than non-commercial ones -- both average and median, both weekday and weekend. The bigger the staff, the more news a station ran, as usual, but number of stations didn't consistently affect volume of news. Groups of 3 or more local stations ran more news than standalone or combo operations, and stations in the Northeast tended to run less news than stations elsewhere.

Changes in radio news in the last 12 months and planned for the future – 2015

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Amount of news the past year | 24.1% | 4.6% | 70.3% | 1% |
| Plan to change amount of news next year | 22.1 | 1.5 | 70.8 | 5.6 |

The numbers aren't dramatically different than last year, although the percentage saying they increased the amount of local news rose 4.5 from a year ago. Non-commercial stations were, again, more likely to increase news, and the difference was more pronounced than last year. There were few meaningful differences by group, although the biggest markets were more likely to add news than others. Changes in the percentages expecting to add or cut news this year were even smaller. Almost three times as many non-commercial news directors expect to add local news -- but they're apparently an optimistic lot, and they always say that. Overall, the biggest markets and the biggest news departments are most likely to expect to add local news.

Changes in newscasts in the past year

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No change |
| All radio news | 16.3% | 8.3% | 74.9% |
| Major market | 32.4 | 12.5 | 57.1 |
| Large market | 16.1 | 3.1 | 80.6 |
| Medium market | 16.2 | 10 | 72.1 |
| Small market | 6.7 | 7.1 | 85.7 |

The percentage of stations adding or cutting newscasts was almost identical to a year ago. The biggest change was among major market stations -- which both added and cut more than any other group. Both additions and subtractions covered the full range of times. Additions to morning drive, midday and afternoon drive were exactly tied for top honors. Well behind all three were very early morning (4 a.m. or 5 a.m.) and all day additions. Cuts were similar. Morning and afternoon drive tied for tops in cutbacks with midday about half those levels and all day behind that.

Note that added, cut and no change will not add up to 100% because some stations both added and cut.

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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.