**News director profile ... 2016**

**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. This article, on TV and radio news directors, generally falls under the “more interesting” category rather than “critically important.”

**The not-so-secret business life of a TV news director**

A new question in this year’s survey asked about changes in the role of news directors (and how they spend their time) in the last year.

Are you spending more or less time on **corporate responsibilities**? In TV, news directors split just about down the middle. Just under half, at 49.2%, said time on corporate responsibilities is the same as a year ago. Almost that many, at 48.5%, said more time. Just 2.3% said less. Surprisingly, at least to me, is that market size and staff size made relatively little difference. What made a difference? News directors at ABC affiliates were way more likely to say more: 62.2%. And news directors in the Northeast were higher than those in any other region: 58.8%.

Are you spending more or less time **meeting with the general manager**? In TV, a majority, at 55.8%, said the same. More than a third, at 35.6%, said more, while 8.6% said less. Market size made for differences – although not consistent ones. Markets 51 to 100 were more likely to say “more”: 43.7%. Markets 151+ were overwhelmingly likely to say the same: 74.5%. Affiliation made less of a difference here, and news directors in the Northeast were less likely to say they’re spending more time with the GM than they used to.

Are you spending more or less time on **new directives from the owner/manager**? In TV, the answer, again, was closer to half and half. Just over half, at 50.2%, said the same … while 45.9% said more time. Four percent said less. Market size made no difference at all, nor did staff size until you got down to the very smallest newsrooms. There, 38.1% said more time – much lower than all the others. Affiliation made a huge difference. News directors at ABC stations overwhelmingly said more time on new directives: 59.3%; news directors at Fox stations were high as well at 50%.

Are you spending more or less time on **big picture planning**? Nearly 60% of TV news directors, at 59.7%, said yes to that question. Just under a third, at 32.7%, said the same, and 7.6% said less. Market size mattered. News directors at top 100 markets all came in at about two-thirds saying more time. Market 151+ was at 56%, and 101 to 150 was just under half. Staff size made the biggest difference. Almost three-quarters of the news directors in the biggest shops said they were spending more time on big picture planning, and the percentage dropped steadily from there down to under 50% in the smallest newsrooms. News directors at ABC and CBS stations were higher than those at NBC or Fox, but news directors at other commercial stations were the highest of all.

Are you spending more or less time on **coping with limited staff or resources**? Just under half, at 49.3%, of the TV news directors said the same. Most of the rest, at 41.1%, said more time coping. 9.5% said less. The smaller the market and the smaller the newsroom, the more likely for the news director to report spending more time coping with less. Not surprisingly, then, news directors at the relatively few non-commercial stations that run local news on a daily basis scored near 80% saying they spend more time coping with less.

Are you spending more or less time on **hands-on daily operation**? In TV, the answers were split more broadly than for the other questions. A total of 39.8%, said the same, but almost as many, at 38.5%, said more hands-on. That left 21.7% saying less time. Staff size made the difference. The smaller the newsroom, the more hands-on time spent by the news director … hitting 71.4% more time in the smallest newsrooms.

By the way, these series of questions came out of a suggestion from a news director responding to the previous year’s survey. I can’t promise to be able to squeeze in your suggestion for next year, but I’d be glad to try. Just let me know. You can reach me at [bob.papper@hofstra.edu](mailto:bob.papper@hofstra.edu).

**TV: Age**

The typical TV news director remained in the mid 40s. The average age was 47.3, and the median was 47. That's about a year older than last year – which would seem to make sense.

In TV, news directors were a little younger in the Northeast, but there were no other meaningful differences based on staff size or network affiliation.

News director age by market size

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Market size | Average age | Median age |
| 1 - 25 | 48.7 | 48 |
| 26 - 50 | 46.7 | 44 |
| 51 - 100 | 47.9 | 48 |
| 101 - 150 | 46 | 44 |
| 150+ | 48 | 48.5 |

Overall, the age ranged from 26 to 73 … which is exactly one year older than a year ago for both ends of the spectrum.

The average TV news director has been news director at that station for 4.8 years -- although the median remained at just 3. The average dropped by nearly a year, which may mean that some long-time news directors retired in the last year (either voluntarily or not). The longest serving news director at the same station has been there for an impressive 32 years – just a year more than another news director. I had more news directors in the 30s a year ago, but I don’t know whether they retired or simply didn’t fill out this year’s survey. Or left to do hospital PR or something.

Generally, the durability averages (time spent as news director) went up as market size went down. In top 50 markets, average times as news director were 3 and 4 years, but in markets 101+, the average was nearly 6. Staff size made no difference, but news directors at CBS stations had been there, on average, a little longer, and news directors at Fox stations were there less time. There was a bit more stability in the Midwest than elsewhere. Of course, as a long time Midwesterner, I’d say it always felt that way anyway.

The average TV news director has been a news director somewhere for a total of 9.8 years … with a median of 7. The longest serving news director had been in that role, somewhere or other, for 42 years, but I found another at 40 and several in the mid and upper 30s. Averages varied by market size. Staff sizes were all about the same except for the smallest staffs. News directors in the smallest shops had less, overall news director experience. Network affiliation didn’t make any difference, but news directors at other commercial stations tended to have been news director for more years, and news directors at non-commercial stations tended to have less experience,.

Almost half (49.8%) of all TV news directors are currently news director at the one and only station where they have ever been news director. That’s down 1 point from a year ago.

Men news directors continue to be older than women news directors. The average male TV news director is 48.9 ... with a median age of 49. Women TV news directors average 43.2 years old ... and a median of 43. The averages for both men and women are up a bit less than 1 year, but the median for men, at 49, went up by one year while the median for women, at 43, is up by two years. Doesn’t seem fair, does it?

**TV news director names**

I’m not sure exactly why this has captured as much interest as it has, but since it has … I’ll do this silly calculation again. 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). Third year in a row (out of the three years I’ve done this).

2. Bob (combined with Rob, Robb and Robert). That’s a 3-position jump for this fine name.

3. John (combined with Jack). It’s down from #2 because I didn’t combine it with Jon and Jonathan this year because I was persuaded that they’re different names. Even if I did combine with Jon and Jonathan, it would still be a tie for second.

4. David (and Dave). Down from third last year.

5. Jim (and James). It’s down two spots from last year, but that’s because I didn’t combine it with Jamie because I was persuaded that Jamie could be a different name. If I included it, Jim would be back up to third place. Yes, it’s that close.

6. Mark (and Marc). No change from last year.

7. Steve (and Stephen). Up one notch.

8. Tie: Scott. Same spot.

Jeff (back in the top 10).

Kevin (also back in the top 10).

Dropping out of the top 10 in this critical race: Matt (and Matthew) and Dan (with Daniel). Tom and Rick/Rich/Richard were farther back.

Most common female names for news directors:

1. Kelly. Up from third place last year.

2. Jennifer (combined with Jenny). Same place as last year.

3. Tie: Julie (with Juli). That’s up 3 places from a year ago. Way to go!

Tracy (with Tracey and Traci). I list Julie first because there are fewer variants even though Tracy is new to the list.

5. Tie (6 ways for the rest of the top 10): Andrea

Kim (with Kimberly)

Amy (with Amie)

Anne (with Anna)

Susan (with Sue and Susie)

New this year: Tracy, Kim, Amy, and Anne.

Dropping off the list is last year’s first place winner: Cathie (with Cathy, Kathy, Kathryn, Kate and Kay). A huge blow. Also off this year: Karen, Denise, Heather and Stephanie.

I’m not sure that I’ll do this again. I could be counting sheep instead.

**The not-so-secret business life of a radio news director**

In radio, the answer to, “Are you spending more or less time on **corporate responsibilities**?” got very different responses than in TV. More than three-quarters (77%) said the same, but almost all the rest, at 19.9%, said more. Less came in at 3.1%. Interestingly, commercial and non-commercial made no difference. The bigger the staff, the more likely that more time was spent on corporate responsibilities. Large and major markets were the highest, and the smallest markets were way lower than all the rest.

Are you spending more or less time **meeting with the general manager**? Radio was much more likely than TV, again, to say the same. More than eight in ten, at 81.2%, said the same. But two and a half times as many of the rest said more (13.4%) rather than less (5.4%). Again, the bigger the staff and the bigger the market, the more likely that there were more meetings.

Are you spending more or less time on **new directives from the owner/manager**? In radio, three-quarters (75.7%) said the same, but more than three times as many of the rest said more (19%) as said less (5.3%). Once again, the bigger the staff, the more likely to be spending more time on new directives. The smallest markets and stations in the South were noticeably less likely to say more time.

Are you spending more or less time on **big picture planning**? Two-thirds of radio news directors and general managers said they were spending the same amount of time on big picture planning (66.3%), but more than a quarter, at 27.4%, said more. Just 6.3% said less. Non-commercial stations and stations with the biggest staffs were most likely to be spending more time.

Are you spending more or less time on **coping with limited staff or resources**? Sixty percent of radio news directors and general managers said the same, but almost all the rest, at 37.4%, said more. Just 2.6% said less. Stations with three or more news staffers and groups of two or more stations were most likely to be coping with limited staff or resources.

Are you spending more or less time on **hands-on daily operation**? In radio, nearly two-thirds (65.1%) said the same. Again, most of the rest, at 30.9% overall, said more. Just 4% said less. The numbers held fairly steady for all groups except groups of 6 or more stations – where 42.1% said more time in hands-on operation.

**Radio: Age**

Radio news directors used to come in a little younger than those in TV, but not this year or last year. Overall, the average age in radio was 47.6, and the median was exactly 50. Commercial station news directors were about 7 years older than those at public stations. Counter intuitively, radio news directors in the biggest markets were slightly younger than others. Radio news director ages ranged from 20 years old up to 84.

Radio news directors have been on the job as news director for an average of 9.5 years, but with a median of 5, it's clear that some long time news directors are bringing up the average. I again found multiple news directors who had been in that position for 38 to 40 years (which was the longest). Longevity increased as market size fell; commercial station news directors had been at their stations for much longer than news directors at non-commercial stations; news directors in the West had been at their stations noticeably longer than others.

And their experience wasn't just at that station. The average radio news director had been a news director somewhere for 13.3 years; the median was 10. Both of those numbers are up from a year ago. Almost two-thirds (62.1%) of radio news directors are news director at the only station they've served in that position. That’s virtually identical to last year.

Unlike TV, male and female radio news directors are less than two years apart. Men average 48.1 with a median of 50; women average 46.1 with a median of 48.5. Since last year, the men have gotten a little younger and the women a little older. Now that’s really unfair.

**Radio news directors … and how news fits into their job**

Overall, 70% of radio news directors report that they’re full time station employees … which leaves a huge 30% as part time. That’s down slightly in full time from last year’s 71.4%. Non-commercial news directors are much less likely to be full timers than commercial station news directors. All told, 40.7% of non-commercial news directors are part time compared to 26.9% of news directors at commercial stations. Other than that, there weren’t major differences based on other variables. Note that the question asked whether the news director was a full time station employee -- NOT whether the person was a full time news director.

Part time also applies to news director responsibilities as well. An even higher percentage of radio news directors reported that their primary station responsibility was NOT news: 38.3% overall. Here, commercial stations were much higher than non-commercial ones, with 41.4% of news directors at commercial stations saying their primary station responsibility was not news versus 27.3% of non-commercial news directors. The number was especially high for stations with a news staff of one. There, almost half (48.7%) of news directors said their primary responsibility was not news. That was the same percentage (although not the same people) for the smallest market size (less than 50,000 people).

So if news isn’t the news director’s primary job, then what is? Various, other administrative roles for nearly half (46.7%). In order: station or general manager, program director, operations/administration, programming, owner. Nearly a quarter (22.4%) said on air/DJ/host. Much lower, at 5.6%, came production and sales (tied), followed by a variety of things. Some just said “everything.” Nine percent said they don’t have a news director. One of those wrote, “We are self-directed, meaning when there is news we find a way to get it on the air. Mostly, it’s the morning host who does this and is great!” An interestingly casual approach.

For news directors whose primary responsibility was news, we continued to ask what other roles they had at the station. Overall, two-thirds (66.2%) said they had other responsibilities beyond news. That’s the second drop in a row – from 75.7% two years ago to 71.7% last year. This year’s number is in line with three years ago (64.5%), and it’s well behind the record of 83.1% eight years ago. Commercial stations were more likely to have those added responsibilities than non-commercial stations (69.7% vs. 54.7%). Generally, and not surprisingly, the smaller the staff size and the smaller the market, the more likely for the news director to have additional responsibilities.

What else radio news directors do? 2016

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Other job | Percentage |
| Announcing | 28.7% |
| Program Director | 23.8 |
| General Manager | 17.8 |
| Sales | 16.8 |
| Sports | 13.9 |
| Production | 12.9 |
| Web | 10.9 |
| News Anchor | 9.9 |
| Public Affairs | 8.9 |
| Talk show host | 8.9 |
| Promotions | 6.9 |
| Operations | 5 |
| Producer | 5 |
| Engineer | 5 |
| Other | 5 |

Most changes in the list were relatively modest. Moving down more significantly: general manager dropped by about 10 and operations dropped by 6. Moving up significantly: talk show host went from 0 to 8.9, production rose by 6 and web went up by 4.

**Radio news director role with the web site - 2016**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | In Charge Overall | In Charge of News Content Only | Other | No Management Role |
| All Radio | 23.6% | 49.8% | 5.7% | 21% |
| Major Market | 19 | 52.4 | 9.5 | 19 |
| Large Market | 22.7 | 56.8 | 0 | 20.5 |
| Medium Market | 20.9 | 48.4 | 6.6 | 24.2 |
| Small Market | 28.8 | 46.6 | 6.8 | 17.8 |

Radio web oversight numbers barely moved from a year ago. News directors in the South and West are almost twice as likely to be in charge of the web site overall. News directors in the Northeast are far more likely than others to have no managerial role.

Major markets are those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2015 among all 1,681 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 4,037 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,286 television stations (76.5%) and 484 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,316 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.