**TV news employment near record high ... little change in radio**

**by Bob Papper**

* Local TV news employment up to near record level
* The number of TV newsrooms slips by three
* Radio news little changed ... as usual

Total local TV news employment hit a near all-time high in 2015 … growing by 1% … adding 270 people, according to the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey. That puts total TV news staffing at 27,870, and that edges ahead of 2012 … but remains below the all-time peak in 2001 (28,786). Generally, TV newsrooms keep growing in size, but there aren't as many of them as in past years. Even so, the growth in employment overcame another small loss in the number of stations producing local news.

Three stations stopped producing their own news, leaving 714 stations originating local news, down from last year’s 717. That was down two from the previous year’s 719. And that puts us back on a slow – but again steady – decline in the number of TV newsrooms. I’m aware that there are others who use a much higher number of stations doing news, but they’re counting stations that get news from other stations, and I track those separately since they’re not separate newsrooms.

The average TV station hired 6.8 replacements during 2015 and 1.6 new, additional positions. Replacements are up nearly a person this year, while new hires are up 0.3 compared to a year ago.

In contrast, the latest numbers from the American Society of News Editors (ASNE), released in July of 2015, found that newspaper newsroom staff fell 10.5% from the year before. That's three times the previous year's drop. ASNE puts total newspaper full time newsroom staff at 32,875 at approximately 1,373 daily newspapers. The average U.S. daily newspaper now has 23.9 news staffers; the average local TV news staff is 40.9. I'll post the updated 2016 numbers as soon as they're available.

**TV staffing**

TV staff size – 2015

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Avg full-time | Median full-time | Maximum full-time | Avg part-time | Median part-time | Maximum part-time | Avg total staff | Median total | Maximumtotal staff |
| All TV | 40.9 | 35  | 200 | 4.4  | 2 | 80  | 45.5  | 38  | 200  |
| Big four affiliates | 42.5 | 36  | 200  | 4.2  | 2  | 80  | 46.9  | 40.5  | 200  |
| Other commercial  | 36.6  | 26.5  | 101  | 5.3  | 2  | 38  | 42.7 | 33  | 114  |
| Non-commercial | 6.4  | 6  | 13 | 8.9  | 1  | 45 | 15.3 | 10 | 48  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 70.5  | 77  | 200  | 4.9  | 1  | 27  | 79.4  | 78  | 200 |
| 26-50 | 66.7  | 70 | 120  | 7.9  | 5  | 45  | 74.6  | 75  | 130  |
| 51-100 | 42.5  | 43 | 100  | 4.3 | 2  | 30  | 46.2  | 46  | 100 |
| 101-150 | 29.3  | 28  | 60  | 4.8  | 2  | 80  | 33.9  | 32  | 95  |
| 151+ | 19.4  | 20  | 35  | 1.4  | 0  | 16  | 21.5 | 22  | 45  |

The average full time staff rose by 2.6 this year, and the median full time staff size jumped by 3. All market sizes went up; in fact, almost every measure and almost every category went up. The big four network affiliates were up, and so were other commercial and even non-commercial newsrooms. The exception was part time news employment, which, overall, held steady from a year ago.

Staff size changes … the past year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Don't know |
| All TV news | 49.2%  | 5.7%  | 44.1%  | 1%  |
| Big four affiliates | 48.2 | 4.6  | 46.5  | 0.7  |
| Other commercial | 59.1  | 13.6  | 22.7  | 4.5  |

The percentage of stations that increased news staff rose by 7 points from a year ago; the percentage cutting dropped by about half. Every category increased, although, as usual, some rose more than others. Stations in the top 100 markets all had at least half of the newsrooms growing. Stations in the markets 101+ were in the high 30 percentile range. Network affiliates were all similar, except ABC affiliates which lagged behind the others by more than 10 points. Stations in the South and Northeast were noticeably more likely to grow than stations in the Midwest or West. Almost every year, the bigger the newsroom, the more likely that it got bigger. Not exactly this year. Newsrooms with 51+, 31 to 50 and 11 to 20 news staffers all came in about the same in terms of the percent increasing, and all had at least half of the newsrooms in the group getting bigger. Newsrooms with 21 to 30 and 1 to 10 staffers came in well behind that. The only groups where over 15% said they cut staff included the smallest newsrooms (1 to 10 people) and non-commercial stations.

Planned staff changes … the next year

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 42.5%  | 0.6%  | 51.1%  | 5.8%  |
| Big four affiliates | 41.8  | 0.7  | 52.1  | 5.3  |
| Other commercial | 50  | 0  | 36.4  | 13.6  |

This table has been a pretty good predictor of the year to come, but stations actually increased staff beyond last year’s expectations. This time around, the percentage expecting growth is up 3 points from a year ago. The highest numbers come from markets 26 to 150 and all staff sizes except the smallest. Stations in the South are the most optimistic, and stations in the West the least.

**Radio staffing**

The typical (median) radio news operation had a full time news staff of one -- the same as it's been since I started doing these surveys more than 20 years ago. Radio news remains highly centralized, with the typical radio news director overseeing the news on an average of 2.4 stations with a median of 2. Those numbers are identical to last year. All told, 81% of all multi-station local groups operate with a centralized newsroom. That’s up from last year’s 79.4%.

Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2016

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| No. of Stations | Percentage |
| One | 38.2%  |
| Two | 28 |
| Three | 11.8  |
| Four - Nine | 7.5  |
| Five | 7.3  |
| Six+ | 7.3  |
|  |  |
| Overall | Number |
| Average | 2.4 locally |
| Median | 2  |
| Maximum | 9 locally … 43 elsewhere  |

These numbers have generally stayed pretty steady for the last several years, but this year, almost 62% of radio news directors handle two or more stations – up from almost 53% a year ago. Almost 7% of news directors oversee the news on stations outside their local area.

Radio staff size – 2016

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Avg. full-time | Median full-time | Max full-time | Avg part-time | Med part-time | Max part-time | Avg total staff | Med total staff | Max total staff |
| All radio news | 2.4  | 1 | 40  | 2  | 1  | 45  | 4.6  | 2  | 45  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Major | 7.3  | 2  | 40  | 3.8  | 2  | 33  | 11.8  | 6  | 45  |
| Large | 3.1  | 2.5  | 11  | 1.7  | 1  | 20  | 5  | 4  | 20  |
| Medium | 1.7  | 1  | 13  | 2.1  | 1  | 45 | 3.9  | 2  | 45  |
| Small | 1.3  | 1  | 6 | 1.3  | 1  | 8  | 2.8  | 2  | 10  |

A mixed (but mostly negative) picture again on staffing changes in radio this year. Overall radio news staffing isn’t much changed, but average full time went down by 0.3 from a year ago, with part time going up by the same amount. Bottom line: the typical radio station has one full time person in news. That's been true -- and unchanged -- for more than a couple decades. Non-commercial news departments, on average, are much larger than commercial ones, but last year’s average difference of 3:1 is back down to closer to 2:1. And while the non-commercial average news staffing is 4 full timers, the median staffing is the same as commercial stations: one.

Changes in radio staff in the last 12 months and planned for the future – 2016

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Total news staff the past year | 17.8%  | 7.8%  | 74.1%  | 0.3% |
| Plan to change amount of staff next year | 10.8  | 0.9 | 77.4  | 10.8 |

The percentage of stations that increased staff in 2015 stayed almost exactly the same, but the percentage that decreased staff rose by just over 3 points. Non-commercial stations were twice as likely to add staff as commercial stations. That’s actually a drop for non-commercial stations from a year ago. Stations in groups of 3 (local stations) or more were more likely to add staff than others, but they were also three times as likely to have cut staff. Overall, about the same percentages expect to increase and decrease staff this year as expected it a year ago. Non-commercial stations are three times as likely to expect to add staff as commercial stations. Generally, the bigger the newsroom and the bigger the market, the more likely that the station expects to increase staff. Stations in the South are the most likely to expect to add staff in 2016.

**Web staffing … TV and radio**

Overall, web staffing was not much changed from the year before.

**How many people work on the web? 2016**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Full-time | Part-time | Total |
| All TV | 2.4  | 1.2  | 3.7  |
| Markets 1-25 | 4.5 | 3.1  | 7.6  |
| Markets 26-50 | 3.7  | 0.7  | 4.4  |
| Markets 51-100 | 2.2  | 1.4  | 3.6  |
| Markets 101-150 | 1.7  | 1  | 2.7  |
| Markets 151+ | 1.5 | 0.3  | 1.8  |
|  |  |  |  |
| All Radio | 0.9  | 1  | 1.8  |
| Major Market | 1.9  | 0.8  | 2.7  |
| Large Market | 1.2  | 0.7  | 1.9  |
| Medium Market | 0.7  | 1.2  | 1.9  |
| Small Market | 0.6  | 0.8  | 1.5  |

Overall, the average number of full time people working on the web in TV dropped slightly (0.2) from a year ago, but the story is much more complicated than that. The top 50 markets went up substantially (+0.9 and +0.3), but all the others fell. Part time stayed the same or went up, so the overall staffing numbers for top 100 markets all rose. Geography made little difference, but other commercial stations and non-commercial stations lagged well behind the big four affiliates.

Radio web staffing is virtually unchanged from a year ago. The bigger the market, the more web staff a station likely has, but other variables made little difference – including non-commercial vs. commercial stations.

**Do other staffers help on the web? 2016**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| All TV | 75.4%  |
| Markets 1-25 | 59.9  |
| Markets 26-50 | 76  |
| Markets 51-100 | 73.4 |
| Markets 101-150 | 78.2 |
| Markets 151+ | 84.2  |
|  |  |
| All Radio | 81.6%  |
| Major Market | 76.1  |
| Large Market | 88.3  |
| Medium Market | 83.9  |
| Small Market | 76.8  |

For the second year in a row, TV news staff participation in the web remained almost exactly the same as the previous year. Staff size made surprisingly little difference except in the smallest newsrooms, where *fewer* staffers participated in the station website. Staff participation at Fox affiliates was a little lower than all the other affiliates.

Radio staff participation in the web, which had soared 14 points a year ago, rose by another 7 this year. All the categories went up except small market, which dropped from last year’s 93.8%.

**MMJs/One-Man-Bands - 2016 Update**

Call them one-man-bands, multimedia (MMJ) or backpack journalists -- their use has continued (mostly) to edge upward.

Percentage of TV Newsrooms Reporting Using One-Man-Bands - 2016

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes, Mostly Use OMB | Yes, Use Some OMB | Yes, But Not Much Use | No, Do Not Use |
| All TV | 49.7%  | 33.2%  | 10.8%  | 6.3%  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 25  | 45  | 20  | 10  |
| 26-50 | 21.4  | 50  | 14.3  | 14.3  |
| 51-100 | 41.5  | 39  | 14.6  | 4.9  |
| 101-150 | 67.1 | 22.4  | 5.3 | 5.3  |
| 151+ | 82.6  | 15.2  | 2.2 | 0  |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 18.3  | 52.1  | 19.7  | 9.9  |
| 31-50 | 54.4  | 33.8  | 10.3  | 1.5  |
| 21-30 | 71.4  | 17.9  | 5.4  | 5.4  |
| 11-20 | 93.3  | 3.3  | 3.3  | 0  |
| 1-10 | 80  | 15  | 5  | 0  |

The mostly relentless march of the increasing use of MMJs or one-man-bands continues again in this year's survey. Overall, the use has gone up an average of 2 to 3 points per year for the last six or seven years. That’s about what happened again this year, although the numbers are more variable than usual. “Some” and “Not Much” went up, but “Mostly” and “Do Not Use” went down. Still, use was more up than down, so I’ll call it another 2 to 3 point increase overall.

The staffing (and hiring) article tracks MMJs separately from reporters. And again this year, for the second time, I separated MMJs from reporters in the annual salary survey. You can take a look at those results in the salary article. Spoiler: MMJs consistently came in lower in salary.

**Hiring: Replacements and new positions … TV and radio**

The average **TV** station hired 6.8 replacements during 2015 and 1.6 new, additional positions. Replacements are up nearly a person this year, while new hires are up 0.3 compared to a year ago.

Top **replacement** hires:

1. Producers … 21.4% … up from a year ago

2. Reporters … 20.5% … down from first place last year

3. MMJs … 13.2% … up from a year ago … and if you combine MMJs with reporters that becomes the #1 replacement position at a combined 33.7%

4. Photographers … 12.2% … a big jump from last year

5. Anchors … 11.8% … down from a year ago

6. Sports … 4.8% … including sports reporters … a jump from a year ago and the first time I can remember sports coming in ahead of weather

7. Weather … 3.9%

8. Managers … 3.3% … including news director, assistant news director, executive producer, managing editor, operations manager

9. Assignment editor/desk … 2.6% … about the same as a year ago

10. (tie) Web/digital … 2.2%

 Editor … 2%

All other positions totaled 1.9% combined

For the third year in a row, the list of **new hires** looks quite different from the list of replacements. More so this year than ever before.

1. Producers … 18.1% … same position as last year, but in a much closer field

2. Digital/web/social media … 15.2% … a huge jump from past years

3. Reporter … 13.5% … and if you combine this with MMJ, then it’s #1 at 25.8%

4. (tie) MMJ … 12.3%

 Anchor … 12.3% … about the same as it’s been

6. Photographer … 5.8% … up a bit from a year ago

7. News assistant/AP … 5.3% … that’s a big resurgence for a position that nearly disappeared in the economic downturn

8. Managers … 4.7% … including assistant news director, executive producer, managing editor

9. Weather … 4.1% … up from last year

10. Assignment editor/desk … 2.9% … also up from a year ago

All other positions totaled 5.8% combined

The average **radio** station hired 0.5 replacement positions and 0.3 new hires. Both of those numbers are up from last year. But the median was zero for both in 2015 – the same as 2014. In other words, the typical radio station made no replacement or new hires in 2015 … keeping radio news staffing largely unchanged. As usual. The West led in replacement hiring. New hires, such as they were, were evenly distributed.

The top replacement position, by far, was reporter, with anchor/host, anchor/reporter and news director well behind. For the very few new positions hired, reporters and web positions led the meager field.

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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.