**News Director Profile ... 2017**

**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 “kind of interesting” category rather than “critically important.”

**TV: Age**

The typical TV news director remained in the mid 40s. Okay, upper mid-40s. The average age was 47.6, and the median was 47. That's almost identical to last year … which means either some changes took place or TV news directors simply refused to get older.

News directors at Fox affiliates were about 3 years younger than others, but there were no other meaningful differences this year.

**TV news director age by market size**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Market size | Average age | Median age |
| 1 - 25 | 49.8 | 48 |
| 26 - 50 | 45.6 | 45 |
| 51 - 100 | 48.4 | 48.5 |
| 101 - 150 | 47 | 46 |
| 150+ | 47.5 | 48 |

Overall, the age ranged from 25 to 70 … which is a year younger on the young end and three years younger on the high end.

The average TV news director has been news director at that station for 4.9 years -- although the median remained at just 3. The average rose just a hair from last year. The longest serving news director at the same station has been there for an impressive 32 years. This is the second year in a row that the number of news directors who had been at a station for more than 30 years dropped … although there are a bunch in the mid and upper 20s.

Historically, the durability averages (time spent as news director) go up as market size falls, but that wasn’t the case this year. There was no relationship whatsoever, suggesting a fair amount of turnover this past year. Maybe my old friend Rick Gevers can shed more light on that. It looks like there was a particularly large amount of turnover in markets 26 to 50 and 151+. No idea why that would be.

A bit more turnover at Fox and CBS affiliates than the others. Less turnover in the Midwest.

The average TV news director has been a news director somewhere for a total of 10.5 years … with a median of 8. Both of those numbers are up about a year from a year ago … suggesting that the increased movement of 2016 was more shuffling of the deck than actually changing the cards. The longest serving news director had been in that role, somewhere or other, for 44 years, which barely edged out another who came in at 43.

Averages varied inconsistently by market size, with markets 26 to 50 and 151+ lower than the others. Staff sizes were again 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 much difference, although news directors at Fox stations had slightly less experience. 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. News directors in the West had less experience as news directors than the others; news directors in the Northeast were a bit higher.

Nearly half (46%) 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 nearly 4 points from a year ago … which was down 1 point from the year before.

Men news directors continue to be older than women news directors. The average male TV news director is 49.4 ... with a median age of 50. Women TV news directors average 43 years old ... and a median of 43. Interestingly, men are a year older than a year ago, but women haven’t aged a bit. That’s the same thing I tell my wife.

**TV news director names**

I’m not sure exactly why this has captured as much interest as it has, but since it has, but I’m going to alter the format this year and just do the top five names.

Most common male names for news director:

1. Mike (combined with Michael, Mikel, Miguel and Miguelangel … and, yes, I checked to be sure that all of those are real variants of Mike). On top all four years that I’ve done this. The name comes from the Hebrew Mikha’el, which means, “Who is like God?” But before you take this too much to heart, the idea is that it’s a rhetorical question with the answer “no one.” So keep that in mind in your day to day operations.

2. (tie) Bob (combined with Rob, Robb, Robert and Roberto). This fine name came in second last year as well. It’s from the Germanic Hrodebert … meaning “bright fame.” Of course it does. I listed it second because that’s where it would be if you include Robin, which used to be a variant of Robert but is now considered a separate name.

2. (tie) Jim (combined with James, Jaime and Jamie). Up from 5th place last year. The name derives from Latin (Iacomus) and Hebrew (Ye’aqov – which became Jacob). It means supplanter or seizing by the heel. I’m just the messenger.

4. Mark (and Marc and Marco). Up two places from a year ago. The name is a form of Marcus and comes from the Roman god, Mars, the god of war. No surprise, it means war-like.

5. John (combined with Johnny and Jack). Down two spots from a year ago. It comes from the Latin Iohannes and the Hebrew Johanan … and means gracious. So keep that in mind.

Most common female names for news directors:

1. (tie) Jennifer (combined with Jenna and Jenny … but not Jenelle, which derives from a different name). Up from second place a year ago. It’s from the Cornish Gwenhwyfar, from the Welsh Guinevere (as in Lancelot) … and means white enchantress, the fair one, magical being.

1. (tie) Kathryn (combined with Kate, Kathy, Kay, Cathie and Cathy … yes, they’re all derivatives of Kathryn). This is a stunning jump from last year after the name fell off the top 10 list completely. The origins are a little hazy here. It’s French for pure, clear, but also appears to derive from the Latin Katharina from the Greek Aikaterina or Aikaterine … which could mean torture. Really.

3. Kelly. Down from first place a year ago. The name comes from the surname Kelly, making it Scottish or, more likely, Irish from Ceallach. That means war, lively, aggressive.

4. Susan (combined with Sue, Susie and Suzanne). It’s from the French Susanne, from Latin Susanna, from Greek Sousanna, from Hebrew Sosanna. Depending on origin or translation, it means lily, or rose or lotus. Some flower.

5. (tie) Julie (combined with Juli). Holding at 5th place. It’s from the Latin Julia … youthful, soft-haired, beautiful, vivacious. Nice going.

5. (tie) Tracy (combined with Tracey and Traci). It’s from the Irish Treasach (via Norman French) and means war-like or fighter.

Thankfully, I don't have the data to do this with radio news directors.

**Radio: Age**

For the last several years, radio news directors have been a little younger than those in TV, but not anymore. Overall, the average age in radio was 48.9, and the median was exactly 51. Both numbers are a year older than last year. Commercial station news directors remain about 7 years older than those at public stations. Otherwise, there were no consistent relationships between age and market size or staff size, etc. Radio news director ages ranged from 19 years old up to 79.

Radio news directors have been on the job as news director for an average of 9.9 years, but with a median tenure of 6, it's clear that some long time news directors are bringing up the average. Both numbers are up a half to one year from a year ago. I found at least one news director who had been in that position for 50 years … and multiples in the 40s. Longevity vaguely increased as market size fell; commercial station news directors have been at their stations for longer than news directors at non-commercial stations. The shortest tenure was in the Northeast and the South … and longest in the Midwest and, especially, in the West.

And their experience wasn't just at that station. The average radio news director had been a news director somewhere for 14.6 years; the median was 12. Both of those numbers are up more than a point from a year ago. More than half (57.4%) of radio news directors are news director at the only station they've served in that position. That’s down 5 points from a year ago.

While male news directors in TV are about 6 years older than women news directors, the difference in radio is half that. Men average 50 years old with a median of 52. Women average 46.1 with a median of 49. Since last year, the men have gotten two years older while the women remained the same.

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

Overall, two-thirds (67.6%) of radio news directors report that they’re full time station employees … which leaves a huge 32.4% as part time. Full time radio news directors are down 3.4 from last year … which was down 1.4 from the year before. Commercial radio news directors are 8 points more likely to be full time than non-commercial news directors. The spread was almost 14 points a year ago. All told, 40.7% of non-commercial news directors are part time compared to 26.9% of news directors at commercial stations. The bigger the staff, the more likely that the news director is a full time employee. Otherwise, there were no consistent relationships. 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. More than a third (35.5%) of radio news directors say that news is not their primary responsibility. Here, commercial stations were higher than non-commercial ones, with 37.9% of news directors at commercial stations saying their primary station responsibility was not news versus 29.1% of non-commercial news directors. That’s closer than a year ago. The smaller the staff size, the more likely that news was not the main responsibility. Other categories were variable.

So if news isn’t the news director’s primary job, then what is? Various, other administrative roles led the list. In order: station or general manager, program director, operations/administration, music director. Well behind, but still significant, came announcing or hosting a program. Then it was all sorts of stuff, including sales, production, sports and a list that sounded like pretty much every other job at the station.

For news directors whose primary responsibility was news, we continued to ask what other roles they had at the station. This list is all over the place. At the top, show host and announcer -- presumably beyond news. At half that level came various management responsibilities: programming, general management, operations. Right behind that came community or public affairs. Then sports and sales. Then web and social media. Then it’s just a scattering of answers including engineering, PSAs, promotion and more.

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2016 among all 1,684 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,987 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,409 television stations (83.7%) and 430 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,151 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.