**TV News Employment Slips Slightly ... Little Change in Radio**

**by Bob Papper**

* Local TV news employment dips
* Radio news little changed ... as usual
* Web staffing levels for TV and radio

Total local TV news employment dropped slightly this past year … not because the average newsroom shrank as much as because there are fewer of them than a year ago. Total employment fell by 1% to 27,600 according to the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey. The drop is essentially identical to last year’s gain. That puts the total tied with 2012 for the third highest total staffing ever. The peak came in the dot-com bubble of 2001.

Generally, TV newsrooms keep growing in size, but there aren't as many of them as in past years. Nine TV newsrooms disappeared during 2016 … either the result of market consolidation or some small newsrooms giving up the competition.

So far in 2017, we’ve had two subtractions and one large addition.

Note that you’ll see some companies use a much higher number of stations running news than I use, but I track the number of newsrooms producing news as distinct from stations that get news from others, and I count combined newsrooms as one.

New hires kept pace with last year, but replacement hires slipped slightly from a year ago.

Historically, I’ve always compared TV employment with newspaper employment as compiled by the American Society of News Editors. But, as some of you may be aware, ASNE changed all of that in 2016. It now compiles diversity numbers in a completely different way (thus eliminating comparisons with TV), and it has stopped, altogether, calculating total newspaper employment. Apparently, the relentless release of reduced staffing became too much for the organization and its members. The average TV newsroom already has more staffers than the average daily newspaper. Based on historic numbers and trends, I’d estimate that total local TV news staffing will exceed total daily newspaper staffing by about 2020. Possibly sooner.

**TV staffing**

**TV staff size – 2017**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average full-time | Median full-time | Max full-time | Average part-time | Median part-time | Max part-time | Average total staff | Median total staff | Max  total staff |
| All TV | 40.5 | 35 | 169 | 4.2 | 2 | 70 | 45.2 | 39 | 178 |
| Big four affiliates | 41.5 | 35.5 | 137 | 4.1 | 2 | 70 | 45.6 | 39 | 171 |
| Other commercial | 41.6 | 28 | 169 | 5.9 | 3 | 22 | 55.9 | 42 | 178 |
| Non-commercial | 8.1 | 3.5 | 32 | 4.3 | 3.5 | 10 | 12.4 | 9.5 | 39 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 71 | 83 | 169 | 9.7 | 5 | 70 | 81.3 | 95 | 178 |
| 26-50 | 60.9 | 69 | 105 | 5.2 | 2 | 25 | 68.2 | 72 | 125 |
| 51-100 | 42.5 | 42 | 103 | 4.1 | 2 | 19 | 46.8 | 45 | 111 |
| 101-150 | 29.8 | 28 | 58 | 2.7 | 2 | 17 | 33.3 | 32 | 62 |
| 151+ | 20.4 | 21.5 | 36 | 2.5 | 1 | 15 | 23.2 | 24.5 | 42 |

After a couple years of staff increases, numbers were stable from last year to this. Average total news staff edged down by 0.4, but the median size remained unchanged. Part time staffing, overall, was also mostly unchanged. The biggest and two smallest market groups all increased slightly. Stations in markets 51 to 100 held steady; stations in markets 26 to 50 fell a bit. Big four affiliates fell slightly; other commercial went up slightly.

**TV staff size changes … the past year**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same |
| All TV news | 44.4% | 14.8% | 40.7% |
| Big four affiliates | 44 | 14.7 | 41.3 |
| Other commercial | 52.2 | 21.7 | 26.1 |

A plurality of stations increased staff, but the number is down 5 points from last year. At the same time, the percentage cutting staff, while still small, went up by just over 9 points compared to a year ago. Stations in the biggest markets were most likely to add staff (70.7%) … with the smallest markets the least likely (26%). Fox affiliates were a little more likely than others to add staff; stations in the Midwest were slightly less likely to add staff than the rest of the country.

**TV planned staff changes … the next year**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 22.7% | 7.1% | 64% | 6.2% |
| Big four affiliates | 22 | 7.6 | 63.9 | 6.5 |
| Other commercial | 34.8 | 4.3 | 56.5 | 4.3 |

This table has been a pretty good predictor of the year to come. It underestimated last year’s staff growth, but it’s again right on the money for this year. If it’s correct looking forward, we’ll see little change over the next year. The percentage expecting to increase staff in the next year is down 20 points from last year’s prediction. Almost two-thirds of news directors expect staff size to remain the same. Stations in the biggest markets are most likely to expect to get bigger. So were Fox and NBC affiliates and stations in the South and West.

**What does the staffing look like for an “average TV station”?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| News Director | 1 |
| Assistant News Director | 0.5 |
| Managing Editor | 0.3 |
| Executive Producer | 1.2 |
| News Anchor | 5.3 |
| Weathercaster | 3.2 |
| Sports Anchor | 1.6 |
| News Reporter | 4.1 |
| MMJ | 4.2 |
| Sports Reporter | 0.5 |
| Assignment Editor | 1.4 |
| News Producer | 5.7 |
| News Writer | 0.4 |
| News Assistant/AP | 0.4 |
| Photographer | 6.2 |
| Tape Editor | 1.8 |
| Graphics Specialist | 0.3 |
| Digital Content Manager | 0.7 |
| Social Media Producer/Editor | 0.3 |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Producer | 1.1 |
| Other | 0.3 |

This list totals the average station’s 40.5 news staffers. Market size differences result in varying changes of the relationship among the positions. MMJs outnumber photographers in market 101+, but photographers outnumber MMJs in markets larger than that. MMJs have a big edge over reporters in markets 101+, a very small edge in markets 51 to 100, but reporters have a wide and widening dominance in the top 50 markets.

**MMJs/One-Man-Bands - 2017 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 - 2017**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes, Mostly Use OMB | Yes, Use Some OMB | Yes, But Not Use Much | No, Do Not Use |
| All TV | 54.3% | 29.7% | 10.2% | 5.8% |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 20 | 42.9 | 17.1 | 20 |
| 26-50 | 21.7 | 45.7 | 17.4 | 15.2 |
| 51-100 | 52.8 | 36 | 10.1 | 1.1 |
| 101-150 | 71.4 | 19.5 | 6.5 | 2.6 |
| 151+ | 87 | 8.7 | 4.3 | 0 |
| Staff size: |  |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 23.5 | 45.6 | 20.6 | 10.3 |
| 31-50 | 54.3 | 35.8 | 7.4 | 2.5 |
| 21-30 | 73.4 | 14.1 | 10.9 | 1.6 |
| 11-20 | 95.5 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 |
| 1-10 | 90.5 | 9.5 | 0 | 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. Overall, top 25 markets went down in the use of MMJs; markets 26 to 50 held steady. Stations in markets 51 to 100 went up noticeably, and smaller markets edged up. So I’ll call it another 2 to 3 point increase overall.

**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 23 years ago. Radio news remains highly centralized, with the typical radio news director overseeing the news on an average of 2.5 stations with a median of 2. Those numbers are nearly identical to last year (and the year before). All told, 85.2% of all multi-station local groups operate with a centralized newsroom. That’s up from last year’s 81% … which was up from the previous year’s 79.4%.

**Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2017**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| No. of Stations | Percentage |
| One | 26.1% |
| Two | 21.4 |
| Three | 14.5 |
| Four - Nine | 33.8 |
| Ten+ | 4.3 |
|  |  |
| Overall | Number |
| Average | 2.5 locally |
| Median | 2 |
| Maximum | 9 locally … 60 elsewhere |

Only about 5% of radio news directors oversee news for a station outside their own market. That’s down from last year’s 7%.

**Radio staff size – 2017**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average  full-time | Median  full-time | Max  full-time | Average  part-time | Median  part-time | Max  part-time | Average  total staff | Median  total staff | Max  total staff |
| All Radio | 2 | 1 | 33 | 1.5 | 1 | 12 | 3.5 | 2 | 30 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Major | 4.2 | 2 | 33 | 1.7 | 1 | 8 | 5.1 | 3 | 21 |
| Large | 2.6 | 2 | 25 | 1.5 | 1 | 10 | 4.2 | 3 | 30 |
| Medium | 1.5 | 1 | 8 | 1.4 | 1 | 12 | 3 | 2 | 12 |
| Small | 1.3 | 1 | 6 | 1.5 | 1 | 8 | 2.9 | 2 | 11 |
| Commercial | 1.5 | 1 | 14 | 1.3 | 1 | 10 | 2.9 | 2 | 21 |
| Non-comm | 3.3 | 2 | 33 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 4.8 | 4 | 30 |

The numbers for radio staffing this year vary from unchanged to down. Average full time and average part time both dropped by about half a point … lowering the total average staff from 4.6 to 3.5. Overall, the median staff size remains at 1. I’ve added rows for commercial and non-commercial stations because I have enough of each to make the numbers meaningful … and because they highlight one of the biggest and most consistent differences in local radio news today. The average non-commercial staff size is actually down a little from last year, but the median is up from 1 to 2.

Local groups of 3 or more stations generally had a larger news staff than standalone stations or two-station combos.

**Changes in radio staff in the last 12 months and planned for the future – 2017**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Total news staff the past year | 15.2% | 9.5% | 74.9% | 0.4% |
| Plan to change amount of staff next year | 11.8 | 1.7 | 76.7 | 9.7 |

The percentage of stations that increased staff during 2016 dropped by 2.6, and the percentage that decreased staff rose by 1.7. That’s on top of last year’s 3 point loss. Non-commercial stations were almost three times more likely to add staff than commercial stations. Stations in major markets were most likely to add staff and least likely to cut. Stations in groups of 3 local stations or more were more likely to add staff than others, but they were also the most likely to cut staff. Stations in the Northeast were least likely to add and most likely to cut.

Planned additions and cuts have been a pretty reliable predictor in TV news. Not so in radio, so take the numbers with that caveat. Non-commercial stations are three times more likely to expect to increase staff than commercial stations. That’s usually true … and the results usually back that up. Stations in major markets are most likely to expect to add staff, and stations in the smallest markets are least likely to expect growth.

**Web staffing … TV and radio**

Overall, full time web staffing went up in **TV** in the last year … while part time stayed the same. That was a clear improvement over last year’s stagnation. **Radio** web staffing is virtually unchanged from a year ago.

**How many people work on the web? 2017**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Full-time | Part-time | Total |
| **All TV** | 3 | 1.2 | 3.7 |
| Markets 1-25 | 4.8 | 1.2 | 5.9 |
| Markets 26-50 | 3.9 | 1.4 | 4.5 |
| Markets 51-100 | 3.4 | 1.2 | 4.5 |
| Markets 101-150 | 2.2 | 1.2 | 2.9 |
| Markets 151+ | 1.2 | 0.9 | 1.6 |
|  |  |  |  |
| **All Radio** | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.9 |
| Major Market | 1 | 0.8 | 1.8 |
| Large Market | 1.1 | 0.9 | 2 |
| Medium Market | 1.1 | 1.3 | 2.3 |
| Small Market | 0.3 | 1 | 1.4 |

Almost all **TV** market sizes went up by about half a full-timer, but stations in markets 51 to 100 rose by more than one. Smaller newsrooms saw smaller increases. Network affiliation and geography made little difference.

Major market **radio** web staffing this year held down the numbers. There were no consistent variables by category, but that’s not too surprising given how small the numbers are generally.

**Do other staffers help on the web? 2017**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **All TV** | 76.6% |
| Markets 1-25 | 56.4 |
| Markets 26-50 | 69.2 |
| Markets 51-100 | 75.5 |
| Markets 101-150 | 82.3 |
| Markets 151+ | 91.7 |
|  |  |
| **All Radio** | 70.7% |
| Major Market | 62.6 |
| Large Market | 76.4 |
| Medium Market | 71.9 |
| Small Market | 69.2 |

**TV** news staff participation in the web edged up a point from a year ago ... with markets 51+ going up more than stations in markets 1 to 50 went down. News staffers in the Midwest and South are more likely to participate in the web than staffers elsewhere.

In **radio**, after two years of growth (up 14 points, then 7), radio staff participation in the web fell by about 11 points this year. Every market size went down.

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

The average **TV** station hired 6.5 replacements during 2016 and 1.6 new, additional positions. Both numbers are close to a year ago, although replacements are down slightly.

Top **TV** **replacement** hires:

1. Producers … 23.2% … up from a year ago (and still in first place)

2. MMJs … 17.6% … up from last year’s third place

3. Reporters … 15.9% … sliding from #2 last year to #3 … but if you combine MMJs with reporters that (again) becomes the #1 replacement position at a combined 33.5%

4. Anchors (and anchor/reporter) … 11.8% … edging up from 5th to 4th place

5. Photographers … 11.6% … edging down from 4th place to 5th

6. Weather … 5.1% … up one spot from last year

7. Managers … 3.2% … including news director, assistant news director, executive producer, managing editor, operations manager … up one place

8. Web/digital/social media … 2.9% … up 2 places from a year ago

9. Sports … 2.7% … down three spots from a year ago

10. Tape editors … 2% … which didn’t make the top 10 a year ago

All other positions totaled 4% combined

**New** **TV** hires look different from replacements … and different from a year ago.

1. Producers … 19.1% … okay, that’s the same as the last two years

2. Anchors … 15% … up from 4th place last year

3. MMJs … 14.5% … up in percentage and up one place

4. Digital/web/social media … 13.9% … down slightly from last year

5. Reporters … 7.5% … down two places and way down in percentage

6. Photographers … 5.8% … exactly the same as last year

7. Assignment editors … 4% … the first time I can remember AEs making the list

8. (tie) Weather … 3.5% … about the same as a year ago

Executive producer … 3.5% … big jump here

Directors … 3.5% … first time for this position

All others combined at 9.7%

The average **radio** station hired 0.3 replacement positions and 0.2 new hires. Both of those numbers are down from last year. But the median was zero for both in 2016 – the same as 2015 and 2014. The West led in replacement hiring. New hires, such as they were, were evenly distributed across all sub-groups.

The top **radio** replacement position was reporter, with news director right behind. Well back (in very small numbers): host, anchor, producer, program director. Then we’re in single digits. For the very, very few new positions hired, reporters led the way, followed well behind by anchors and then producers. After that, again, just single digits.

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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.