**Local TV News Employment Drops … but Still Passes Newspaper**

**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey shows total local TV news employment dropped 1.8% over the last year. That’s a loss of 500 jobs … down from last year’s 27,600 to this year’s 27,100. Last year’s total was down 1% from the year before. Part of the loss comes from continuing consolidation in local TV news – a net loss of two local newsrooms this past year. But there’s also been a small shrinkage of both the average newsroom size (down 0.1 from a year ago) and the median size (down a surprising 2 people from a year ago). Even with the drop, local TV news is not far below its peak of 27,900 just before the last recession, and the average local TV newsroom is just below its all-time high.

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. Newspaper consultant and Newsonomics founder Ken Doctor puts total newspaper newsroom employment at 24,000 to 25,000. The average TV newsroom has had more staffers than the average daily newspaper fort a few years. Now, apparently, total local TV newsroom employment is also higher.

**TV staff size – 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average full-time | Median full-time | Max full-time | Average part-time | Median part-time | Max part-time | Average total staff | Median total staff | Maxtotal staff |
| All TV | 40.4  | 33  | 159  | 4.5  | 2  | 125  | 45.9  | 40  | 160  |
| Big four affiliates | 41.7  | 36  | 130  | 4.5  | 2 | 125  | 47.2  | 41  | 153  |
| Other commercial  | 36.8  | 26  | 159  | 5.2  |  1  | 45  | 42  | 28  | 160 |
| Non-commercial | 10.6  | 7  | 26  | 0.8  | 0.5  | 3  | 13.2  | 8.5  | 29  |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1-25 | 75.3  | 89  | 159  | 7.2  | 1.5  | 45  | 83.9  | 94.5  | 160  |
| 26-50 | 66.7  | 64  | 123  | 5.2  | 3  | 19 | 72.6  | 71  | 127  |
| 51-100 | 42.8  | 44  | 103  | 3.8  | 2  | 35  | 46.6  | 45.5  | 111  |
| 101-150 | 28.5  | 28  | 65  | 4.9  | 2  | 125 | 33.6  | 31  | 142  |
| 151+ | 17.6  | 17  | 43  | 3 | 1  | 39  | 21.3  | 21  | 69  |

A mixed picture in total TV news staffing this year. Average full time staff slid by 0.1, and median staffing fell by 2. But this year’s survey involves a slight under-reporting by top 25 market stations and a slight over-reporting of stations in markets 101 and smaller. Big four affiliates rose by 0.2 on average and 0.5 in median numbers, and stations in the top 100 all went up in both average and median staffing numbers. Part time staffing largely held steady.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Don’t know |
| All TV news | 33.3%  | 19.2%  | 46.5%  | 1%  |
| Big four affiliates | 32.7 | 17.8  | 48.4  | 1.1 |
| Other commercial | 43.5  | 34.8  | 21.7  | 0 |

2017 was characterized more by stability than either growth or shrinkage. Almost half of all stations said they stayed the same in staffing, although nearly twice as many stations reported staff expansion versus staffing cuts. Generally, the biggest stations in the biggest markets were most likely to get bigger. A majority of stations in top 25 markets increased in staff, and markets 26 to 50 were dead even in staying the same or adding staff. ABC affiliates were a bit less likely than others to increase staff, and stations in the Northeast and South were more likely to grow than stations in the Midwest and West.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| All TV news | 26.4%  | 4.2%  | 62.4%  | 7.1%  |
| Big four affiliates | 26.3  | 4.3  | 61.9  | 7.5  |
| Other commercial | 22.7  | 4.5  | 68.2 | 4.5  |

This table has been a pretty good predictor of the year to come, although it underestimated both staff increases and staff decreases by about 10 points last year. Still, it’s a decent barometer, and the percentage of news directors expecting staff growth this year is up by 4 points, and the percentage expecting staff declines is down by about 3. There are few discernible patterns to the optimism or pessimism. News directors in the Northeast are the least likely to expect growth and the most likely to expect declines, but that could just be how northeast news directors see the world. They said much the same a year ago, but the numbers didn’t bear out the pessimism. Fox affiliates were most likely to expect growth. That’s what they said last year, too … and that’s what they did.

***Bob Papper is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Hofstra University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. This research was supported by the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication at Hofstra University and the Radio Television Digital News Association.***

**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2017 among all 1,683 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,542 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,333 television stations (79.2%) and 415 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,110 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.