**What's New Online in 2018 for TV**

**by Bob Papper**

More and more television news directors have been contributing answers to the question, “What’s the most important new thing the station is doing online?”

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey got well over 200 answers on the question of what stations were doing new in digital, with 76.9% of TV news directors saying they were doing something new digitally. That’s almost exactly the same number as a year ago.

At the top of the list, at 29.8%, came streaming. Primarily Facebook Live. Some of that involved streaming newscasts, some scheduling Facebook Live before newscasts or during newscasts. Some talked about streaming events or during coverage of news stories. A couple wrote about Facebook newscasts, and while most talked about more streaming and more Facebook Live, one said less. At least less on Facebook rather than the station website. In their own words:

* Concentrated focus on streaming live video on website and Facebook
* Coverage of live events via Facebook Live multiple times a day
* Facebook exclusive newscasts and special projects
* Facebook Lives, news nuggets (short story synopsis aired before newscast)
* Facebook Live during our newscasts
* Live, extended digital only news coverage (not newscasts)
* Long form coverage of live events via social media
* More assertive with breaking news reports on Facebook Live and broadcast of special event coverage - live streaming
* Moving away from using Facebook Live in favor of streaming content on our own properties
* OTT newscast, anchored live stream/Facebook Lives
* TVU to Facebook Live

At 21.8% came strategy and management. That included things like having everyone in the newsroom contribute to the digital side every day … with some monitoring that activity and its success (or not). There were digital producers assigned to each reporter; content approaches differing for each platform; a digital coverage plan established every day; merging the assignment desk with the digital team; better tracking of social media postings; more social media postings; moving to a digital first approach; and one news director said the station had moved to a social media first approach. In their own words:

* 20 push notices per day
* A tease strategy using digital to drive to broadcast.
* Added a Facebook Live strategy
* Asking each person in the newsroom to contribute to our station's digital platforms in some capacity
* Assigning digital producers to individual reporters
* Created a new "digital newsroom" with 24/7 coverage
* Creating more specialty pages for specific big stories and/or news department projects
* Daily digital assignments plan
* On digital it is as much about furthering the personalities as it is furthering the brand
* Hired a multimedia content manager to integrate TV/Digital more strongly
* Focus on social media and 100 percent participation
* Involving entire newsroom in contributing
* Merged assignment desk and digital producers to one work group
* Not giving our content away on Facebook, but using Facebook to draw people to our website
* Posting completed stories before the actual newscast airing
* Putting a news manager in the role of Multiplatform Content Manager, running editorial efforts for both digital and television
* Set minimums for meaningful social media posting for each newsroom employee … measure those interactions
* Setting different digital deadlines for stories … not expecting the same digital requirement/letting story dictate the way we deliver it on our digital platform
* Started tracking analytics of both our website and our social media accounts
* Trained more team members to publish directly to the website in conjunction with our new "beat" system
* We dramatically increased digital staff and reorganized assignment desk in a digital first workflow we call the Bridge
* We instituted a web first mindset (long overdue) and have required EVERYONE to contribute digital content
* We launched a social first campaign that includes social responsibilities for everyone in the newsroom … we are still very active on our site, but our first goal is to get information to on social before going back and updating our site … it has paid gigantic engagement dividends
* We've put up a social news desk monitor in our newsroom to track our digital/social content and the competition's content
* Cross-training
* Focused training on digital elements, including seminars for news, weather and sports

Content issues came next at 16.4% (although some of the strategy issues clearly involved content). Many of the comments here referenced digital only content, special topics just on digital, digital only newscasts, mini-newscasts, more specialty content every day, polls, contests, changes in posting. More web only local postings. One news director noted they stopped posting packages and made the content more digital-friendly. More user generated content. In their own words:

* Added a specific digital effort focused on a rejuvenated downtown area (economic redevelopment)
* Adding more newscasts and special interviews to web … more local sports content too
* Create specific content for digital only and adding live mini-newscasts
* Creating content specific to the platform we are posting on
* Greatly expanded "digital only" and "digital first" content
* In house program for feeding video and writing web stories in same program
* Stopped posting packages - more social videos
* Unique local stories that did not appear on the TV broadcast
* Unique web only content including unique web reporting
* We have started to break big stories down into several smaller bite-sized stories, pushing those out as individual elements as well as producing the long-form pieces … we also have become more consistent in producing “snackable” videos for our social platforms
* Web extra content on stories and a focus on investigative

Just behind, at 13.8%, came software (not including Facebook). In order of mentions: OTT, including Roku and Amazon Alexa … Twitter … YouTube … Instagram … Snapchat … Burst … Banjo … CrowdTangle … Videolicious … 360 video. In their own words:

* Adding CrowdTangle to enhance social media monitoring and engagement efforts
* Banjo social media aggregator
* Expanded into OTT platforms including Roku and Amazon Echo/Alexa
* Instagram stories, social videos, launching social commerce strategy, native advertising, social GIF content strategy for all events and big coverage items
* Newscasts for the Amazon Echo, hourly news briefs on-line
* Started using YouTube for videos
* Videolicious reports, hanging text videos, live drone video, 360 video
* We launched a YouTube channel and developed a YouTube strategy; began producing 360 digital storytelling projects
* Added emphasis to Instagram stories and added Snapchat channel

Push alerts and apps came in at 8.4%

Staffing at 4%. Mostly more, but some rearranging and more oversight, too. In their own words:

* Added a fourth full time digital producer
* Added a web content producer to focus on the website and social media
* Converted a news position into full-time digital responsibilities
* Hired a new Digital EP

Then teases and promotion … moving people from social media to online or on air at 3.1%.

Other, at 2.7%, included technical issues, the use of native advertising and integrating drone video and online.

***Note that there’s a fine line between online and social media … so be sure to check the social media article.***

I didn’t ask whether a TV station has a website this year because it had been 7 years since the last time a TV didn’t have one.

In the past, I’ve asked about all the elements stations included in their website, like video, stills, calendars, etc. But as websites matured, changes had become few and mostly inconsequential. So this year, I just asked if stations had “added or eliminated anything meaningful” from the station website. Just over 85% said no.

So what did the 15% add or cut? The list broke down into three main areas:

Nearly half (48.6%) noted new content: newscasts, weathercasts, traffic, obituaries, investigative, more video, hyperlocal bloggers, geo-specific web pages, timelines and infograms. In their own words:

* Content from local bloggers to add hyper local content
* Friday Featured Photo and Featured Images for look and community involvement
* Homepage video player is gone - no one was watching it
* Unique web only content
* We added a digital reporter who turns original long form stories
* We added local obituaries … it now generates more than 750,000 page views per month
* We're adding much more video to our website ... original, aggregated, feed, and raw
* We've added special sections, more web exclusive content and station promotion banners

37.8% mentioned internal organizational issues: more people to work on the site, fewer people working, combining 2 station websites into 1, cutting seldom-used elements or pages and just reorganizing material. In their own words:

* Added additional resources to work on the web/social media accounts
* Hired two experienced digital producers which improved the digital journalism and user engagement
* Reduced number of pages. Concentrate on super-serving fewer pages
* Staffing, analytics tools
* We eliminated pages with little or no traffic or sampling

13.5% were technical changes: new websites, new CMS (which didn’t always go well), new equipment to automate posting. In their own words:

* Geo specific web pages
* New equipment to manage multiple platforms at one time
* To get more traffic, the first story that pops up on the app is the top local story … but after that, it scrolls to the best performing stories throughout our group, which may or may not be local
* Use of timelines and Infograms
* We lost 15 years of archived stories with a transition to a new CMS
* We recently revamped the overall flow and look of our website - much easier to navigate and more visually appealing - less cluttered

**Percentage of web content that's only on the web - 2018**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **All TV** | 24.6% |
| Markets 1-25 | 30.4 |
| Markets 26-50 | 29.7 |
| Markets 51-100 | 24.4 |
| Markets 101-150 | 23.7 |
| Markets 151+ | 19.4 |
| Staff size |  |
| 51+ | 29.3 |
| 31 - 50 | 23.9 |
| 21 - 30 | 24.2 |
| 11 - 20 | 16.7 |
| 1 - 10 | 15.3 |

Web content that’s only on the web dropped about 2 points compared to a year ago, and virtually every category and grouping went down. There was no meaningful difference based on network affiliation or region.

**Percentage of web content that's user-generated - 2018**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **All TV** | 9.4% |
| Markets 1-25 | 9.4 |
| Markets 26-50 | 8.8 |
| Markets 51-100 | 11 |
| Markets 101-150 | 7.6 |
| Markets 151+ | 9.5 |
| Staff size |  |
| 51+ | 8.6 |
| 31 - 50 | 9.5 |
| 21 - 30 | 11.3 |
| 11 - 20 | 8.2 |
| 1 - 10 | 5.4 |

These UGC numbers are nearly identical to a year ago. The only meaningful difference from one grouping to another is that Fox affiliates were generally higher than other network affiliates.

**Web traffic**

**TV station website traffic during the past 30 days - 2018**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Page Views (in thousands) | Unique Visitors (in thousands) |
| All TV | 5,894.6 | 1,335.5 |
| Market Size |  |  |
| 1-25 | 19,655.9 | 3,809.6 |
| 26-50 | 7,145.7 | 1,087.1 |
| 51-100 | 4,659 | 1,297.9 |
| 101-150 | 3,237.3 | 545.3 |
| 151+ | 1,434 | 564 |

Overall, the latest figures represent big jumps in both page views and unique visitors. Page views are up nearly a million and a half, and unique visitors are about 50%. Most groupings went up, although the biggest jumps came in top 25 markets. As usual, the bigger the market and the bigger the staff, the more page views and unique visitors. Note that almost half of TV news directors (49.2%) said they didn’t know the numbers.

Web staffing numbers and newsroom participation in working on the web are included in the staffing article. Web profitability and paywalls are discussed in the business of news articles.

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**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.