**There’s Plenty New in Social Media in TV**

**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found a lot of new things going on with social media in local TV news, and almost 200 news directors told us what they’ve been doing this past year.

**What's the most important new thing you started doing with social media this past year?**

All told, 72.2% of news directors said they were doing something new this year. That’s down 13 points from last year, but up 5 from the year before. Pretty much every grouping was at about 70% or higher except the smallest newsrooms (1 to 10 people) at 47.6% and Fox affiliates at 40%.

So what’s new? There are significant changes from a year ago. Then, it was all about Facebook Live, with more than 55% of news directors including FBL in their answer. Facebook Live still takes top honors, but it’s down to 40.1% who talked about Facebook Live or just doing more streaming. In their own words:

* We’re doing more Facebook Live which is a great recruiter for our on air
* Facebook Live only content and discussions
* More strategic Facebook Lives, including daily sports and streaming some specials
* More unique content and Facebook Lives with talent and guests
* Utilizing Facebook Live on a consistent basis has boosted social growth

Strategic moves came next … doubling last year’s 16.3% to this year’s 33.3%. Strategic efforts took a lot of forms, including technical, responding/connecting back with viewers, more staff and more and better training, more innovation and experimentation, getting more people in the newsroom involved and way more tracking of results. In their own words:

* Better engagement, better training, more tools, more knowledge, more execution
* Dedicated a digital and social media EP to focus on innovating in that space
* Deep dives with talent to significantly increase their engagement
* Doing more social listening and gathering story ideas from comments, connecting with followers on social media
* Focus on engagements not follower counts
* Focused more on branding than clicks
* Increase engagement and push talent to share and engage
* Making sure we respond to questions, engage
* Setting specific engagement metrics for talent, one-on-one training with talent
* Social listening – dedicated one person each shift
* Strategic scheduling for social media posts
* We’ve been experimenting with groups … creating groups tied to specific content we’re producing
* Mapping the day for digital and on air
* Refining content to quality over quantity

Next, at 11.9% each, came more posting and more software. More posting included comments focused just on volume, like more posting to Facebook or more content on social media, more video and more digital only stories. In their own words:

* Digital only stories, “snackable” content

Software included Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, True Anthem, Social News Desk, audiograms and content for Amazon’s Alexa.

Filling out the rest: push notifications and odds and ends.

**Facebook**

The Survey didn’t ask whether the TV station had a Facebook page. It’s been four years since one station said it didn’t have a Facebook page, and I think the news director just checked the wrong box. Every TV station uses Facebook; the issue is how they use it and how much they get out of it.

This year’s Survey added a couple questions to try to quantify some of those answers.

**Number of social media engagements in the most recent month**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Avg. No. (in thousands) | Median No. (in thousands) | Minimum | Maximum |
| Overall TV | 1,211 | 622.5 | 27 | 7,165.5 |
| Market size |  |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 2,228.9 | 2,000 | 145 | 7,165.5 |
| 26 – 50 | 715.4 | 670 | 141.7 | 1,500 |
| 51 – 100 | 1,736.1 | 1,267.5 | 130.9 | 4,800 |
| 101 – 150 | 764.5 | 385 | 50 | 2,130.7 |
| 151+ | 561.5 | 489 | 27 | 1,800 |

Since this is the first year for the question, I can’t compare it to anything. Interestingly, there was actually a closer relationship between number of engagements and staff size than market size. Mostly, the bigger the staff, the more engagements. Overall, Fox affiliates led the category, followed by NBC, CBS and then ABC. Stations in the West came out on top, followed by the South, Midwest, and the Northeast lagging behind.

Another new question asked about **the percent of station web traffic that came from social media:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| Overall TV | 50.7% | 50% | 10% | 98% |
| Market size |  |  |  |  |
| 1 – 25 | 38.1 | 40 | 10 | 70 |
| 26 – 50 | 53.7 | 54 | 32 | 90 |
| 51 – 100 | 47.3 | 42 | 15 | 80 |
| 101 – 150 | 50.7 | 40 | 18 | 82 |
| 151+ | 58.9 | 57 | 16 | 98 |

There’s a minor trend for an increase in the percentage of web traffic from social media as market size and staff size fall, but it’s not consistent, and the smallest staff size (1 to 10 people) is much lower than all the others. It will be interesting will be how this table changes over time.

**Twitter**

**Is the TV newsroom actively involved with Twitter? 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Constantly | Daily | Periodically | No |
| All TV | 50.6% | 38.7% | 8.8% | 1.9% |
| Market |  |  |  |  |
| 1 - 25 | 51.3 | 35.9 | 10.3 | 2.6 |
| 26 - 50 | 83.8 | 16.2 | 0 | 0 |
| 51 - 100 | 54.9 | 38 | 5.6 | 1.4 |
| 101 - 150 | 41.3 | 47.6 | 6.3 | 4.8 |
| 151+ | 31.4 | 47.1 | 21.6 | 0 |
| Staff size |  |  |  |  |
| 51+ | 70.6 | 26.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| 31 - 50 | 54.1 | 39.3 | 6.6 | 0 |
| 21 - 30 | 36.5 | 50 | 11.5 | 1.9 |
| 11 - 20 | 26.7 | 50 | 20 | 3.3 |
| 1 - 10 | 11.1 | 66.7 | 22.2 | 0 |

It looks like we’re seeing a real change in the use of Twitter by TV stations. Last year, the numbers stabilized and even edged down just slightly. This year, there’s an 18 point drop in the constantly column, a 12 point jump in the daily column, a 4 point (doubling) in the periodically column and an increase of 1.5 in the no column. And that shift was across the board except for the market 26 to 50 group, which held steady. Every other group dropped, although it was most pronounced in the Midwest. More and more stations may be deciding that Twitter is a better place to learn about news than to broadcast it. We’ll keep an eye on this.

**Other software programs in use**

This is the third year that I’ve asked news directors what software they use – beyond Facebook and Twitter. I also asked news directors how they were using the software. More than 230 news directors answered the question – the highest response to this question ever. An astonishing 95.5% said they were using “other” software programs, although most included Facebook or Facebook Live (or both) in the list.

All told, 86.6% of news directors noted **Facebook** and/or **Facebook Live**. The others probably thought they didn’t need to bother.

What were they doing? This is just a sampling … in their own words:

* News updates and live reports
* Post stories to link back to homepage
* Helping drive traffic to web and TV
* Growing audience and loyalty as well as promoting
* Part of our new social media first strategy
* Posting video, articles, links, live reporting, engagement with viewers/users
* To let people know what’s happening now and what is expected to happen later
* To drive brand awareness of our station, which is #2 in market share and to promote news content our audience finds valuable
* Promote, post stories, ask for tips, gather news

At 63.4%, **Instagram** was an easy second place. Again, a sampling of why … in their own words:

* Photos across DMA
* Primarily photos
* To reach the younger audiences
* Weather photos and forecasts
* Pretty pics
* We use it to give a behind-the-scenes look
* Content showcase, more visual stories
* Sharing photos from stories and viewer pics
* Promotions

Well back, in third place at 23.7% … **Snapchat**:

* For sports primarily and outdoor events
* Breaking news, story development through the day

And well behind that, **YouTube** at 6.9%:

* Posting broadcast and digital only videos

**Twitter** came in at 4.7%. I had just asked about Twitter, so that’s part of why it’s so low.

* It isn’t that big in this market, but we still post to it

At 2.2% … **Pinterest** … no reasons/use given

At 1.3% … **Social News Desk** … no responses/use given

Under 1% each: **Banjo** … **Burst** (for UGC submissions) … r**eddit** … **Nextdoor** … **TweetDeck** (to monitor news and news staff to maximize content and content sharing)

Two years ago, stations listed 22 software programs (along with Facebook and Twitter). Last year, that list dropped to 12, and this year it’s down to 10. I’d call that a trend.

And although more news directors answered this question than in previous years, almost all the software programs (except Facebook) were down. Instagram fell from 82.4% to 63.4%. Snapchat dropped from 34.1% to 23.7%. Pinterest fell from 8% to 2.2%. Only YouTube went up … from 4.5% to 6.9%.

***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.