**Local Radio News Working at Getting Better, More Innovative**

**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found that a third of radio news directors and general managers said they had done something in the past year that they believed had significantly improved their journalism. Non-commercial stations were more than twice as likely to say they had done something. The very largest newsrooms, the biggest station groups were more likely than the others. The bigger the market, the more likely to say yes … from 22.4% up to 50% from the smallest markets to the largest ones.

At the top of the list came management/organizational responses, at 59.2%. Training led the list here, along with hiring more staff, hiring better staff and restructuring the news department and responsibilities. In their own words:

* Added a new morning host/feature producer
* Attend the National Association of Farm Broadcasting Convention
* Attended a seminar on dealing with Native American tribes
* Attended journalism conventions
* Brought on a more experienced news director
* Changed reporter
* Continuing education and professional development
* Created an investigative unit and hired a data journalist
* Enrolled in business courses to better understand local economy
* Hired a better news director
* Hired a full-time reporter
* Hired digital news editor
* Hired our first full-time investigative journalist
* I attend conferences, read a lot of newspapers and websites and go without sleep
* I attended the Excellence in Journalism Convention in Anaheim
* More planning/discussing enterprise reporting
* More training and added more newscasts
* Reporters collaborating on stories
* Researched what it means to be a community journalist
* Revamped our news code of journalism
* Staff changes that gave more leadership, coaching and training to less-experienced staff … a news manager in the newsroom from 1 am to 7 pm
* We are doing quarterly ethics chats that stimulate conversation about dilemmas we face in daily news coverage … we have also implemented safety training for coverage of dangerous situations like violent protests
* We also are working to be more transparent with our audience

At 31% came content. Mostly more news and better news. Better news sourcing and more investigative journalism. Some of the improvements focused on the web or social media. In their own words:

* Added more actualities
* Added more local news
* Added more sources for news gathering
* Added several stock image accounts for the news director to use when posting stories to station websites & social media

Technical issues came in at 5.6%. Mostly, that involved new equipment. In their own words:

* Laptop remote filing

Miscellaneous answers filled out the remaining 4.2%.

**News innovation**

Another new, related question: What’s the most innovative thing your newsroom started doing this year?

More than half (54.5%) the news directors and general managers said they did something innovative this past year. That was 71% of non-commercial news directors and GMs and 48% of commercial station ones. The bigger the staff, the bigger the market, the more likely that the station did something innovative. I break down the answers into four broad (and sometimes overlapping) areas:

Digital was the easy winner here, with 44.4% of the responses related to online and social media. More content online came out on top, including more video. Streaming and Facebook Live coverage and newscasts came next and then other social media comments. In their own words:

* A LOT of online videos and podcasts
* Beefed up social media
* Creating more content on social media
* Doing daily newscasts and spot coverage via Facebook
* Extended and more in depth newscasts for website/podcast only
* Facebooking from news events
* Facebook Live of press conferences, breaking news
* Facebook Live streaming in studio interviews
* Facebook Live during breaking news or local human interest events
* Greatly increase the amount of data journalism produced visually for our web site
* Locally produced Investigative journalism on our website
* More live social media coverage of events, more video use online
* More video and slide shows on station website
* Posting local news stories on social media
* Using our website and social media to push out written news in conjunction with radio news
* Using video to drive social media traffic

Next came content at 32.4%. New podcasts, lots of in-depth, series or special coverage and just more and better coverage. In their own words:

* A series of hour long special reports on specific topics
* Baseball in Spanish
* Doing live coverage on current events
* Health reporting partnership
* In-depth reporting on topics like domestic abuse and drug abuse
* More focus on internally produced features
* More live interviews with newsmakers
* New weekday news magazine segments
* “Newsbits”
* Podcasting news interviews
* Pulling reporters off daily/weekly beat coverage to focus on documentaries, series
* Radio and web in-depth project on poverty
* Special veterans series

Then came management issues at 15.7%. Staffing changes, more efforts with the community, collaborative projects and changes in oversight. In their own words:

* Attempting more community engagement
* Better tracking of story production
* Collaborating with partner station
* Hired a local meteorologist
* News roundtable discussions with members of the community
* Partnered with TV
* Partnerships with print and TV outlets
* Visiting in person with local groups to gauge news/programming interests
* We are full media, digital news on web on air in emails and social media ... we are going with Facebook Live on many of our location reporting

At 7.4% came technical changes. That included one station that said it got a computer. In their own words:

* Covering multiple meetings/night via cable & online
* Tieline codec for live remote broadcasting
* Using Hearken as a transparency tool and increase engagement with our audience
* We duplicate our newscasts in shorter forms on music stations - we also can simulcast at the flick of a switch on all stations

***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.