**Radio Staffing Largely Stable … As Usual**

**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey shows 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 24 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 identical to last year (and the year before). All told, 84.1% of all multi-station local groups operate with a centralized newsroom. That’s down 1 from last year’s 85.2%.

The biggest differences in radio news staffing are between commercial and non-commercial stations. Along with a news director, the average commercial radio station has half a reporter (0.5) while the average non-commercial station has almost 2 (1.9). On the other side, the average commercial station has about a third of a person (0.3) in sports, and the average non-commercial station has zero.

**Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2018**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| No. of Stations | Percentage |
| One | 32.4% |
| Two | 25.1 |
| Three+ | 42.5 |
|  |  |
| Overall | Number |
| Average | 2.5 locally |
| Median | 2 |
| Maximum | 13 locally … 13 elsewhere |

Only about 7% of radio news directors oversee news for a station outside their own market. That’s up from last year’s 5%, but the same as it was two years ago. I heard from more news directors and general managers where just one station or one station in the group does local news, but the average and median number of stations that a news director oversees remained at 2.5 and 2, respectively.

**Radio 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 | Max  total staff |
| All Radio | 2 | 1 | 30 | 1.6 | 1 | 15 | 3.8 | 2 | 40 |
| Market size: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Major | 6.2 | 2 | 30 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 8.7 | 6 | 40 |
| Large | 2.3 | 2 | 6 | 1.7 | 1 | 14 | 4.1 | 4 | 14 |
| Medium | 1.5 | 1 | 7 | 1.4 | 1 | 15 | 3 | 2 | 15 |
| Small | 0.9 | 1 | 6 | 1.5 | 1 | 10 | 2.4 | 1 | 10 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Commercial | 1.6 | 1 | 30 | 1.2 | 1 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 40 |
| Non-comm | 3.4 | 1 | 27 | 2.6 | 1 | 15 | 6.1 | 4 | 28 |

Most of the numbers for radio staffing are unchanged (or nearly so) from a year ago. The one exception is major market news departments. The median – or typical – number didn’t change, but the averages went up a bit. That means that we heard from more all-news radio stations -- most of which are in major markets -- than a year ago.

But the numbers don’t change the big picture. Overall, the median staff size remains at 1. I added rows for commercial and non-commercial stations a year ago because the sample was large enough of both kinds of stations to do it. It also highlights some of the biggest and most consistent differences in local radio news today. The average full time staff is just about the same as a year ago, with non-commercial stations double commercial ones. But, the median number at non-commercial stations dropped back down to 1 this year from 2 a year ago.

Local groups of 3 or more stations generally had a larger news staff, on average, than standalone stations or two-station combos. But all groups had a median staff size of 1.

**Changes in radio staff in the last 12 months and planned for the future – 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Total news staff the past year | 12.3% | 8% | 78.5% | 1.1% |
| Plan to change amount of staff next year | 13 | 0.8 | 74.4 | 11.8 |

The percentage of stations that increased staff during the past year dropped by almost 3 points from a year ago – following the previous year’s 2.5 point fall. The bigger the staff, the more likely the station increased staff even more. Mostly, the bigger the market, the more likely for a station to increase staff size; the smaller the market, the less likely the station cut news staff. Non-commercial stations were twice as likely to increase staff as commercial stations. But they were also twice as likely to cut staff. Interestingly, the Northeast led the way in both increases and cuts. No idea why.

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 … although this past year’s hiring really didn’t back that up. The bigger the market, the more likely the station expects to add staff – peaking at 27.8% in major markets. The bigger the news staff, the more likely to expect hiring, and stations in the Northeast were more likely to expect to add staff than any other region.

Major markets are those with 1 million or more potential listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

***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.