**Most Radio Stations Run Local News … but a Little Less of It This Year**

**by Bob Papper**

In radio, 79.3% of radio news directors and general managers say their station or station group is locally owned. The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found that, overall, 68.9% of all radio stations in the survey report running local news … 74% of AM stations and 66.9% of FM stations. That’s down about two points overall. AM stations went up by about 3, but FM dropped just over 4 points.

Overall in the survey, 81.7% of local radio groups report that at least one station in the group runs local news. That's 3 points up from last year – which had been down 2 points from the year before.

Most stations in our survey that run local news are not primarily news or talk stations; they’re music stations. Of the 433 stations that run local news – and told us what their programming was – just 18.5% included all news (2.3%), news and information (1.8%), news/talk (14.1%) and business news (0.2%).

**Average and median minutes of locally-produced radio news – 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weekday average | Weekday median | Saturday average | Saturday median | Sunday average | Sunday median |
| All radio | 71.2 | 44.5 | 18.1 | 0 | 12.9 | 0 |
| Major market | 107.2 | 60 | 21.3 | 0 | 21.9 | 0 |
| Large market | 103.4 | 60 | 14.8 | 0 | 7.5 | 0 |
| Medium market | 67 | 40 | 16.7 | 0 | 14.1 | 0 |
| Small market | 46.8 | 30 | 19.9 | 5 | 10.5 | 0 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Commercial | 75.3 | 45 | 21.1 | 3.5 | 14.3 | 0 |
| Non-comm | 57.7 | 30 | 8.1 | 0 | 8.3 | 0 |

Weekdays dropped in average amount of news while weekends went up. But medians (or typical numbers) tend to tell more accurate stories. Median weekday times went up for major market stations (usually the influence of all news stations) while all other market sizes went down. Medians for almost all groups (and overall) for the weekend remained at zero local news. The overall amount of local news dropped by about 12 minutes per weekday. That’s about how much it went up in major markets, but large markets slipped by about 2, and medium markets dropped by 20 with small markets dropping by 18.

Generally, the bigger the staff, the more news a station runs, although the real dividing line was two versus three or more news staffers. Overall, stations with 3 or more full time news staffers ran about 50% more news than stations with one or two full-timers. Geography made no difference.

Historically, commercial stations run more local news than non-commercial stations. Last year, the numbers were identical, but this year we’re back to a big edge for commercial stations, with the median amount of local news 50% higher at commercial stations compared to non-commercial ones.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
| Amount of news the past year | 19.8% | 5.7% | 73.3% | 1.1% |
| Plan to change amount of news next year | 15.4 | 0.8 | 74.5 | 9.3 |

These numbers aren't terribly different from last year, although the percentage saying they increased the amount of local news fell by about a point. That’s the third year in a row for small but consistent drops. Non-commercial stations were, again, more likely to increase news – up 8 points over commercial stations. That’s just about the same as a year ago.

Over time, the planned amount of news has been a better and better predictor of the coming year. Projected news for this year is just about the same as a year ago … down by nearly a point. Non-commercial news directors are twice as likely to expect to increase local news as commercial news directors. They always say that, but this time it’s a little less so. Generally, the bigger the news staff, the more expectation of increasing local news. No other variables made a consistent difference.

**Changes in radio newscasts in the past year**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Added a newscast | Cut a newscast | No change |
| All radio news | 15.6% | 10.8% | 75% |
| Major market | 16.1 | 6.2 | 78.8 |
| Large market | 12.8 | 7.5 | 80 |
| Medium market | 15.9 | 11 | 74.7 |
| Small market | 16.7 | 14.7 | 70.6 |

Commercial stations were about 50% more likely than non-commercial stations to have added a newscast in the past year, but both groups were in low double digit numbers. The overall percentage of stations adding a newscast dropped more than 3 points from a year ago, and the numbers are low across the board. Most of the additions came at varying times of the weekday morning.

Cutting a newscast was a different story. The number there dropped nearly 3 points from a year ago, but market size clearly made the difference. The smaller the market, the more likely that a newscast was cut. Commercial stations were a little more likely to cut than non-commercial ones.

Cuts were slightly more likely in the afternoon than in the morning.

Note that added, cut and no change will not add up to 100% because some stations both added and cut.

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.