An introductory note, if you will. 2019 marks my 25th year conducting the

RTDNA (before that, RTNDA) Annual Survey. First at Ball State University and now at Hofstra University. It has been my privilege to do this, and I want to thank RTDNA, Ball State and Hofstra for the support and opportunity to keep this going. Most of all, I want to thank all of you who spend what I know is way too much time poring over the way too many questions that I ask on this survey. Thank you.

- Bob Papper

**TV Salaries Up**

**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found that local television news salaries rose by 3.1% in 2018. That's up four-tenths of a point from last year. And with inflation remaining low at 1.9%, it means real wage growth in local TV news hit 1.2%. That’s just a hair over the U.S. average hourly wage gain of 3% for 2018. Not bad.

**Television news salaries – 2019**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| News Director | $113,400 | $100,000 | $25,000 | $450,000 |
| Assistant News Director | 84,400 | 80,000 | 20,000 | 200,000 |
| Managing Editor | 77,400 | 70,000 | 35,000 | 167,000 |
| Executive Producer | 62,200 | 58,000 | 29,500 | 155,000 |
| News Anchor | 97,000 | 75,000 | 22,400 | 700,000 |
| Weathercaster | 77,700 | 65,000 | 21,000 | 400,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 60,900 | 48,000 | 22,000 | 260,000 |
| News Reporter | 55,700 | 50,000 | 20,000 | 185,000 |
| MMJ | 39,100 | 33,800 | 20,000 | 180,000 |
| Sports Reporter | 39,100 | 35,000 | 21,000 | 75,000 |
| Assignment Editor | 45,100 | 40,000 | 25,000 | 120,000 |
| News Producer | 39,600 | 35,000 | 22,000 | 130,000 |
| News Writer | 42,200 | 41,800 | 17,000 | 120,000 |
| News Assistant | 31,700 | 30,000 | 12,000 | 70,000 |
| Photographer | 40,700 | 35,000 | 19,000 | 120,000 |
| Video Editor | 35,900 | 33,000 | 11,000 | 110,000 |
| Graphics Specialist | 42,900 | 40,000 | 15,000 | 90,000 |
| Digital Content Manager | 52,600 | 45,000 | 22,000 | 150,000 |
| Social Media Prod/Editor | 39,100 | 35,000 | 18,000 | 75,000 |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 38,400 | 35,000 | 12,000 | 95,000 |

Salaries look better on the average … with 80% of salaries going up and just 20% going down. Unfortunately, median salaries are more indicative of typical pay, and half of those went up with a quarter each going down or staying the same.

Doing the best, overall: managing editor, executive producer, news anchor, weathercaster, reporter, sports reporter, news writer, news assistant and video editor.

I separated MMJ from news reporter five years ago. And, once again, it’s clear that reporters get paid a lot more money, overall, than MMJs. The spread this year was $16,200. It was $11,000 last year and $12,000 the year before. Some of that difference is due to market size: more reporters are in bigger markets. But reporters make more than MMJs in markets 1 to 25, 26 to 50 and 51 to 100. So it’s not just market size.

**Five and ten year median television news salary comparisons 2019 to 2014 to 2009**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2019 | 2014 | 5-Year  Percentage Change | 2009 | 10-Year Percentage Change |
| INFLATION |  |  | +7.5% |  | +19% |
| All TV news |  |  | +15.6 |  | +27 |
| News Director | $100,000 | $85,000 | +17.6 | $76,000 | +31.6 |
| Asst. News Director | 80,000 | 65,000 | +23.1 | 65,000 | +23.1 |
| Managing Editor | 70,000 | 65,000 | +7.7 | 55,500 | +26.1 |
| Executive Producer | 58,000 | 52,500 | +10.5 | 54,000 | +7.4 |
| News Anchor | 75,000 | 62,500 | +20 | 57,500 | +30.4 |
| Weathercaster | 65,000 | 55,500 | +17.1 | 50,000 | +30 |
| Sports Anchor | 48,000 | 45,000 | +6.7 | 41,000 | +17.1 |
| News Reporter\* | 50,000\* | 31,000\* | +61.3 | 26,000\* | +92.3 |
| MMJ\* | 33,800\* | 31,000\*\* | +9 | 26,000\* | +30 |
| Sports Reporter | 35,000 | 30,000 | +16.7 | 29,000 | +20.7 |
| Assignment Editor | 40,000 | 38,000 | +5.3 | 35,000 | +14.3 |
| News Producer | 35,000 | 31,000 | +12.9 | 28,500 | +22.8 |
| News Writer | 41,800 | 32,000 | +30.6 | 26,000 | +60.8 |
| News Assistant | 30,000 | 30,000 | - | 25,000 | +20 |
| Photographer | 35,000 | 30,500 | +14.8 | 28,000 | +25 |
| Video Editor | 33,000 | 29,300 | +12.6 | 25,000 | +32 |
| Graphics Specialist | 40,000 | 35,000 | +14.3 | 28,500 | +40.4 |
| Digital content mgr\*\* | 45,000\*\* | 37,500\*\* | +20 | 33,000\*\* | +36.4 |
| Social Media prod/ed\*\*\* | 35,000\*\*\* | 33,000\*\*\* | +6.1 | 33,000\*\*\* | +6.1 |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 35,000 | 33,000 | +6.1 | 33,000 | +6.1 |

\*News reporter comparison is problematic because I now separate reporter from MMJ

\*\*Comparison is with web/mobile writer/prod in 2014 and 2009

\*\*\*Comparison is with web/mobile writer in 2014 and 2009

After 6 straight years of overall salary increases ahead of inflation, the big, long-term salary picture looks better than ever. Overall, TV news salaries have risen at twice the rate of inflation over the last 5 years, and all positions have done better than inflation except sports anchor, news assistant and web writer/producer (social media producer really isn’t a valid comparison).

Even over the last decade, three-quarters of the positions are now running ahead of inflation. That’s a huge improvement over just a few years ago.

Keep in mind that wages in this country, generally, had not kept pace with inflation until 2017.

**Median TV news salaries by market size – 2019**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 – 25 | 26 – 50 | 51 – 100 | 101-150 | 151+ |
| News Director | $200,000 | $156,500 | $109,000 | $90,000 | $60,000 |
| Asst News Director | 130,000 | 96,300 | 75,000 | 54,000 | 50,000 |
| Managing Editor | 115,000 | 80,000 | 52,000 | 53,000 | \* |
| Executive Producer | 82,500 | 72,500 | 54,500 | 40,000 | 34,500 |
| News Anchor | 160,000 | 141,300 | 85,000 | 60,000 | 40,000 |
| Weathercaster | 140,000 | 109,000 | 68,300 | 53,000 | 35,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 113,800 | 90,000 | 50,000 | 40,000 | 28,000 |
| News Reporter | 82,000 | 60,000 | 45,000 | 29,500 | 26,500 |
| MMJ | 67,500 | 50,800 | 35,000 | 30,000 | 25,000 |
| Sports Reporter | 56,000 | 49,500 | 35,000 | 30,000 | 28,000 |
| Assignment Editor | 62,500 | 45,000 | 40,000 | 39,000 | 31,500 |
| News Producer | 57,500 | 48,000 | 35,300 | 30,000 | 26,000 |
| News Writer | 47,000 | 35,000 | 30,000 | 30,000 | \* |
| News Assistant | 41,800 | 31,000 | 24,500 | 22,500 | 16,000 |
| Photographer | 62,000 | 50,000 | 35,000 | 30,500 | 29,000 |
| Video Editor | 43,500 | 35,500 | 30,000 | 26,300 | 20,000 |
| Graphics Specialist | 57,500 | 42,000 | 35,000 | 34,000 | 15,000 |
| Digital Content Mgr | 76,300 | 56,000 | 50,000 | 39,000 | 31,000 |
| Social Media Prod/Ed | 57,500 | 40,000 | 34,000 | 26,000 | 26,000 |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 52,500 | 41,800 | 34,500 | 27,000 | 27,000 |

\*Insufficient data

The table of salaries by market size allows me to take a closer look at both salaries by market size as well as salaries by position.

Usually there are winners and losers in the salary race, but this time around things were remarkably even. Four positions tended to do a little better, overall, than others: weathercaster, news reporter, photographer and web/mobile writer/producer. All four went up in four of the five market sizes. No position went up across the board. And no position fared noticeably worse than others.

As I’ve noted before, there’s a tendency for last year’s losers to come out on top the next year and vice versa. The picture was more mixed this time around. Nearly all market sizes had a majority of positions go up in salary, but both markets 1 to 25 and 26 to 50 were overwhelmingly so. That’s a reversal for the biggest markets, but 26 to 50 had a strong year a year ago as well. Markets 101 to 150 came in last a year ago and third this time around with a bare majority of positions moving up. Markets 51 to 100, which came out on top last year was barely edged out for last place by markets 151+. Both had nearly two-thirds of the positions the same or down from a year ago.

**Median TV news salaries by staff size – 2019**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 51+ | 31-50 | 21-30 | 11-20 | 1-10 |
| News Director | $165,000 | $105,000 | $80,000 | $63,500 | $55,000 |
| Asst News Director | 100,000 | 70,000 | 52,000 | 40,000 | 42,500 |
| Managing Editor | 80,000 | 56,000 | 50,000 | 36,000 | \* |
| Executive Producer | 72,500 | 51,000 | 40,000 | \* | \* |
| News Anchor | 135,800 | 80,000 | 55,000 | 45,000 | 37,500 |
| Weathercaster | 108,300 | 65,000 | 50,000 | 34,500 | 40,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 88,500 | 48,000 | 38,000 | 25,000 | 26,500 |
| News Reporter | 60,000 | 47,300 | 29,000 | 24,000 | 30,000 |
| MMJ | 50,000 | 34,000 | 30,000 | 25,000 | 24,000 |
| Sports Reporter | 51,000 | 34,000 | 30,000 | 23,000 | 28,000 |
| Assignment Editor | 46,000 | 40,000 | 35,500 | 38,500 | \* |
| News Producer | 48,000 | 34,000 | 28,500 | 28,500 | 28,000 |
| News Writer | 36,000 | \* | \* | \* | \* |
| News Assistant | 33,000 | 18,000 | 24,000 | \* | 20,000 |
| Photographer | 48,000 | 32,500 | 31,500 | 36,300 | 24,000 |
| Video Editor | 35,000 | 30,000 | 25,000 | 23,000 | 19,000 |
| Graphics Specialist | 40,000 | 40,000 | \* | \* | \* |
| Digital Content Manager | 59,000 | 45,000 | 36,000 | 34,000 | 30,000 |
| Social Media Prod/Ed | 40,000 | 30,000 | 40,000 | \* | 24,000 |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 44,300 | 31,300 | 26,000 | 24,000 | \* |

\*Insufficient data

Sorting by size of newsroom leads to some unusual patterns. If you worked in the largest newsrooms, 51+ people or mid-size, 21 to 30 staffers, it was a good year for salaries … with nearly three-quarters of the positions moving up in pay. But if you worked in any of the other sized-newsrooms, three-quarters of the positions either went down in salary or stayed the same. It’s not a pattern I normally see, and I have no explanation.

Note that the two smallest newsroom groups include a number of newsrooms in the biggest markets, so salary numbers for those group tend to be erratic. “Other commercial” station salaries tended to be higher than most, and non-commercial salaries tend to be lower (as both usually are). Differences by network or region were inconsistent and inconsequential.

***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 2018 among all 1,685 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,481 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,310 television stations (77.7%) and 645 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,938 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.