Please note the new partnership on this research as it becomes the RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey. I am privileged to have joined the outstanding faculty at Syracuse. That’s the name you’ll see on the research from here on … and that’s what you’ll see on the painfully long survey questionnaire later this fall.

Bob Papper

**TV Salaries Lose Ground to Low Inflation**

**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that local television news salaries rose by a paltry 0.9% in 2019. That's down from last year’s increase of 3.1%. So even though inflation was a modest 2.3% in 2019, it means real wages in local TV news fell by 1.4%. The last time real wages fell in TV news was in 2012. That was the last year when local TV news salaries actually dropped (1.9%) from the previous year.

**Television news salaries – 2020**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| News Director | $105,800  | $95,000  | $25,000  | $450,000  |
| Assistant News Director | 83,100  | 75,000  | 20,000  | 250,000  |
| Managing Editor | 83,800  | 67,500  | 40,000  | 225,000  |
| Executive Producer | 63,100  | 58,000  | 30,000  | 165,000  |
| News Anchor | 88,000  | 72,000  | 21,000  | 700,000  |
| Weathercaster | 75,900  | 61,000  | 21,000  | 400,000  |
| Sports Anchor | 61,200  | 50,000  | 20,000  | 270,000  |
| News Reporter | 59,600  | 53,300  | 22,000  | 225,000  |
| MMJ | 38,400  | 33,500  | 21,000  | 145,000  |
| Sports Reporter | 37,400  | 35,000  | 21,000  | 72,000  |
| Assignment Editor | 45,200  | 40,000  | 22,000  | 150,000  |
| News Producer | 39,200  | 35,000  | 20,000  | 165,000  |
| News Writer | 46,600  | 41,000  | 18,000  | 130,000  |
| News Assistant | 37,100  | 35,000  | 15,000  | 77,500  |
| Photographer | 41,900  | 40,000  | 15,000  | 130,000  |
| Video Editor | 37,500  | 33,800  | 19,000  | 130,000  |
| Graphics Specialist | 43,300  | 40,000  | 20,000  | 90,000  |
| Digital Content Manager | 55,600  | 50,000  | 24,000  | 350,000  |
| Social Media Prod/Editor | 41,600  | 39,500  | 23,000  | 80,000  |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 40,300  | 36,000  | 15,000  | 300,000  |

Salaries look a little better on average … with 65% of salaries going up and 35% going down. Unfortunately, median salaries are more indicative of typical pay, and just 40% of median salaries went up, compared to 35% that went down and 25% that remained the same.

Generally, those farther down the pay scale did better than those at the higher end. As a group, the salaries of digital team members did better than any other.

**Five and ten year median television news salary comparisons 2020 to 2015 to 2010**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2020 | 2015 | 5-Year Percentage Change | 2010 | 10-Year Percentage Change |
| INFLATION |  |  | 9.4% |  | 19% |
| All TV news |  |  | 13.9 |  | 26.4 |
| News Director | $95,000  | $92,000 | +3.3 | $75,000 | +26.7 |
| Asst. News Director | 75,000  | 70,000 | +7.1 | 60,000 | +25 |
| Managing Editor | 67,500  | 60,000 | +12.5 | 55,000 | +22.7 |
| Executive Producer | 58,000  | 50,000 | +16 | 50,000 | +16 |
| News Anchor | 72,000  | 65,000 | +10.8 | 55,500 | +29.7 |
| Weathercaster | 61,000  | 60,000 | +1.7 | 50,000 | +22 |
| Sports Anchor | 50,000  | 42,500 | +17.6 | 40,000 | +25 |
| News Reporter\* | 53,300\*  | 37,000 | +44.1 | 30,000 | +77.7 |
| MMJ\* | 33,500\*  | 37,000 | -9.5 | 30,000 | +11.7 |
| Sports Reporter | 35,000  | 33,000 | +6.1 | 28,000 | +25 |
| Assignment Editor | 40,000  | 40,000 | 0 | 32,500 | +23.1 |
| News Producer | 35,000  | 30,500 | +14.8 | 30,000 | +16.7 |
| News Writer | 41,000 | 30,500 | +34.4 | 27,000 | +51.9 |
| News Assistant | 35,000 | 25,000 | +40 | 25,000 | +40 |
| Photographer | 40,000 | 30,000 | +33.3 | 27,000 | +48.1 |
| Video Editor | 33,800 | 27,500 | +22.9 | 25,000 | +35.2 |
| Graphics Specialist | 40,000  | 35,000 | +14.3 | 31,000 | +29 |
| Digital content mgr\*\* | 50,000\*\*  | 35,000 | +42.9 | 37,500\* | +33.3 |
| Social Media prod/ed\*\*\* | 39,500\*\*\*  | 35,000 | +12.9 | 37,500 | +5.3 |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 36,000  | 35,000 | +2.9 | 37,500 | +4 |

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

\*\*Comparison is with web/mobile writer/prod in 2015 and 2010

\*\*\*Comparison is with web/mobile writer in 2015 and 2010

Even with a comparatively poor salary showing this year, TV news salaries are running ahead of inflation compared to both five and ten years ago. But some of that is deceptive. Some salaries aren’t clean comparisons – like reporters, MMJs, and digital staff. News writer and news assistant aren’t clean either. Those salaries have jumped over the years, but a lot of the increase reflects the fact that, especially for news assistant, they’re generally only found in larger markets today than they used to be.

Clearly running well ahead of inflation: managing editor, news anchor, sports anchor, photographer and video editor.

**Median TV news salaries by market size – 2020**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 – 25 | 26 – 50 | 51 – 100 | 101-150 | 151+ |
| News Director | $194,000  | $146,800  | $106,500  | $90,000  | $64,000  |
| Asst News Director | 127,500  | 95,000  | 75,000  | 55,000  | 63,000  |
| Managing Editor | 135,000  | 91,300  | 65,000  | 49,000  | 61,000 |
| Executive Producer | 85,300  | 70,000  | 53,000  | 43,000  | 39,000  |
| News Anchor | 172,500  | 127,500  | 85,000  | 55,400  | 40,000  |
| Weathercaster | 150,000  | 106,000  | 70,000  | 49,500  | 41,800  |
| Sports Anchor | 127,500  | 82,000  | 55,000  | 40,500  | 32,000  |
| News Reporter | 92,500  | 65,000  | 49,500  | 42,000  | 29,800  |
| MMJ | 65,000  | 55,000  | 36,000  | 30,000  | 28,000  |
| Sports Reporter | 57,500  | 54,000  | 37,000  | 30,500  | 27,800  |
| Assignment Editor | 60,000  | 48,500  | 40,000  | 38,000  | 32,000  |
| News Producer | 60,000  | 48,000  | 36,300  | 30,000  | 30,000  |
| News Writer | 55,000  | 31,000  | 32,000  | 32,500  | \* |
| News Assistant | 50,000  | 35,000  | 32,000  | 24,000  | 28,000  |
| Photographer | 54,500  | 49,000  | 36,500  | 29,700  | 30,000  |
| Video Editor | 50,000  | 39,000  | 33,000  | 26,000  | 27,800  |
| Graphics Specialist | 57,500  | 45,300  | 37,000  | 27,000  | 37,500  |
| Digital Content Mgr | 95,000  | 75,000  | 52,500  | 36,000  | 31,500  |
| Social Media Prod/Ed | 60,000  | 50,000  | 32,000  | 27,500  | 27,500  |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 52,500  | 42,000  | 35,000  | 29,300  | 30,000  |

\*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 fairly clear winners and losers in the salary race, but for the second year in a row, that really wasn’t the case. As usual, of course, salaries generally go up with market size and staff size.

By market size, more salaries went up in the smallest markets, 151+, than any other. Otherwise, there wasn’t much difference in general movement from one market to the next, although markets 26 to 50 and 101 to 150 had more down salaries than other market groups.

By position, only reporter and news assistant went up in every market size. On the other end, news director and news anchor were both down or the same in four of the five market sizes.

**Median TV news salaries by staff size – 2020**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 51+ | 31-50 | 21-30 | 11-20 | 1-10 |
| News Director | $155,000  | $104,000 | $78,000 | $63,000  | $55,500 |
| Asst News Director | 99,000  | 68,000  | 50,000  | 75,000  | 20,000  |
| Managing Editor | 90,000  | 55,000  | 52,000  | 40,000  | \* |
| Executive Producer | 72,500  | 50,500  | 38,500  | 42,500 | \* |
| News Anchor | 130,000  | 77,000  | 54,000  | 40,000  | 37,500  |
| Weathercaster | 109,300  | 62,800  | 49,300  | 39,000  | 37,500  |
| Sports Anchor | 80,000  | 50,000  | 38,000  | 32,000  | 25,500  |
| News Reporter | 75,000  | 50,000  | 33,000  | 24,000  | 34,500  |
| MMJ | 55,000  | 35,000  | 29,000  | 28,000  | 28,000  |
| Sports Reporter | 50,000  | 35,000  | 27,500  | 24,500  | \* |
| Assignment Editor | 48,500  | 40,000  | 35,000  | 29,000  | \* |
| News Producer | 48,000  | 35,000  | 30,000  | 31,000  | 30,000  |
| News Writer | 41,000  | 45,000  | \*  | \* | 40,000  |
| News Assistant | 39,800  | 26,500  | 24,000  | 15,000  | \*  |
| Photographer | 50,000  | 35,000  | 32,000  | 26,000  | 40,000  |
| Video Editor | 39,000  | 30,000  | 27,000  | 27,000  | 30,000  |
| Graphics Specialist | 55,000  | 32,500  | 37,500  | \* | \*  |
| Digital Content Manager | 75,000  | 50,000  | 35,000  | 30,000  | 27,000  |
| Social Media Prod/Ed  | 43,500  | 32,000  | 45,000  | 26,500  | 30,000  |
| Web/Mobile Writer/Prod | 42,000  | 34,500  | 29,300  | 26,000  | \* |

\*Insufficient data

Sorting by size of newsroom usually leads to some sort of meaningful information. Not so much this year. Newsrooms with 31 to 40 staffers fared a little worse than others, with a majority of newsroom positions dropping in salary compared to last year. At the same time, no newsroom staff size had more than 60% of the positions move up in salary from a year ago.

Note that the two smallest newsroom groups include a number of newsrooms in the biggest markets, so salary numbers for those groups 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.

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**About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2019 among all 1,702 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,427 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,313 television stations (77.1%) and 673 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,996 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.