

TV Websites Helping the Bottom Line by Bob Papper

The latest RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey shows websites are nearly universal in television, and local news is an integral part of that. In the past year, there's been a big jump in the use of video on television station websites and a noticeable increase in web profitability. None of that applies to radio websites, which are virtually unchanged from a year ago.

On average, 99 percent of all television stations have websites. If you break those numbers down, in television, every large news operation (31 or more news employees) had one. Only stations with 1 - 10 news staffers came in below 97 percent (at 93 percent). Independent stations were less likely to have websites.

Almost 98 percent of those television websites include local news. Exceptions are those stations with 1 – 10 newsroom employees (at 82 percent). Most of those smaller newsrooms are in the “other commercial” category and mostly in the West.

Radio is unchanged from a year ago – 87 percent of all radio stations have their own websites. Stations with larger staffs and stations in groups or group-owned stations are more likely to have websites. Stations located in the South were less likely than others to have websites.

The percentage of radio station websites that include local news actually slipped from a year ago, from 77 percent to 70 percent. Single, stand alone stations were less likely to run local news on the web, as were stations with small staffs.

Who Has Websites?

All TV	98.6%	All Radio	87.2%
Market Size		Market Size	
1 - 25	100.0	Major	90.9
26 - 50	98.0	Large	94.1

51 - 100	100.0	Medium	91.1
101 - 150	97.3	Small	81.7
151+	97.7		

In TV, station websites are virtually universal, and every large news operation (31 or more employees) had one. Only stations with 1-10 employees came in below 97 percent (at 93.1 percent). Just three network affiliates and one PBS station didn't have a website. Independent stations were less likely to have websites. Radio is unchanged from a year ago. Stations with larger staffs are more likely to have websites. Stations in groups and group-owned were a little more likely to have websites; stations in the South were less likely than others to have websites.

How Many Websites Include Local News?

All TV	97.5%	All Radio	69.8%
Market Size		Market Size	
1 - 25	97.5	Major	50.0
26 - 50	96.0	Large	75.0
51 - 100	100.0	Medium	65.9
101 - 150	97.3	Small	75.5
151+	95.2		

Among the TV stations with websites, nearly every station in every category includes local news--except those stations with just 1-10 newsroom employees (at 81.5 percent). Most of those are in the "other commercial" category and mostly in the West. The percentage of radio station websites that included local news (of those that had a website) actually slipped from a year ago. Single, stand-alone stations were less likely to run local news on the website, and, generally, stations with smaller staffs were less likely to run local news.

Elements of Local News Websites

TV	Text	Still Pictures	Audio	Streaming Audio	Live Camera	Video
All TV:	95.1%	72.4%	34.7%	38.8%	38.8%	58.2%
Markets 1 - 25	97.4	76.9	56.4	59.0	64.1	76.9
Markets 26 - 50	93.8	81.3	60.4	52.1	47.9	72.9
Markets 51 - 100	95.7	72.9	34.3	40.0	38.6	67.1
Markets 101 - 150	97.2	69.0	16.9	19.7	31.0	38.0
Markets 151+	90.0	62.5	15.0	35.0	17.5	42.5

Radio	Text	Still Pictures	Audio	Streaming Audio	Live Cameras	Video
All Radio:	89.2%	41.0%	26.5%	27.7%	0.0%	2.4%
Major Market	100.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	0	0
Large Market	91.7	41.7	50.0	33.3	0	8.3
Medium Market	92.9	50.0	25.0	35.7	0	0
Small Market	84.2	34.2	21.1	23.7	0	2.6

In this measure of website complexity, there were no consistent changes in TV from last year—and few big changes at all—except for the use of video. That jumped from appearing on 38.6 percent of TV websites a year ago to 58.2 percent now. All market sizes went up—most rose significantly. Stations with the smallest staffs, both 1 - 10 and 11 - 20, tend to bring most of the averages down, as do other commercial and PBS affiliates. There are no consistent patterns by geography. Overall, the radio figures are little changed from a year ago, and there were few consistent patterns in the numbers.

What Do Users Want From Your Site?

Rank	All TV This Year	All TV Last Year	All Radio This Year	All Radio Last Year
1	Local weather	Local weather	Local news	Local news
2	Local news	Local news	Consumer news	Local weather
3	Money	Headlines	Other information	Local sports
4	Other info	Local sports	Local weather	Other information
5	Entertainment	Weather elsewhere	Entertainment news	Talent bios
6	Headlines	Health	Food	National news
7	Local sports	Education	Live cameras	Entertainment news
8	Weather elsewhere	Traffic	Local sports	Headlines

9	Live cameras	National news	Weather elsewhere	International news
10	Traffic	Other information	Health	Sports elsewhere
11	International news	Talent bios	International news	Traffic
12	National news	Entertainment news	Headlines	Money
13	Education	Sports elsewhere	Talent bios	Food
14	Consumer news	Food	Traffic	Weather elsewhere
15	Health	Live cameras	Education	Health
16	Talent bios	Consumer news	Money	Education
17	Sports elsewhere	International news	National news	Live cameras
18	Food	Money	Sports elsewhere	Consumer news

In TV, for the fifth year in a row, local weather and local news lead the way, but there are quite a few changes below that. Perhaps signaling an unease with the economy, money shot up from last at the end of 2004 to third place this time around. Sports fared poorly, with local sports slipping from 4 to 7 and sports elsewhere dropping from 13 to 17. At number 11, international news placed the highest in the last 3 years, up from 17 last year and 18 the year before. Others moving up more than two places: other information, entertainment, live cameras. Others moving down more than two places: headlines, weather elsewhere, national news, education, health, food. In radio, local news remained on top, but local weather slipped two places to number 4, and local sports dropped five places to number 8. Consumer news shot up from the bottom last year to number 2 this time. Others moving up more than two places: food, live cameras, weather elsewhere and health. Others moving down more than two places: headlines, talent bios, traffic, money, national news and sports elsewhere.

How Many People Work on the Web?

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All TV	1.56	2.16	3.72
Markets 1-25	2.24	0.47	2.71
Markets 26-50	1.34	2.55	3.89
Markets 51-100	1.64	2.07	3.71
Markets 101-150	1.37	3.04	4.41
Markets 151+	1.32	2.08	3.40
All Radio	1.1	0.7	1.8
Major Market	2.2	0.7	2.9
Large Market	0.8	0.7	1.5
Medium Market	1.2	0.7	1.9
Small Market	0.8	0.7	1.5

In TV, web staffs rose another half a person or so in the last year. Overall, ABC affiliates had the largest web staffs, and Fox affiliates had the smallest. Web staffs in the West were, overall, a little smaller than others. In radio, full time web staffs remained the same, but part time help dropped so the total fell from a year ago. There was a significant difference in web staff size by ownership, with group-owned stations generally employing more people than independent stations.

Do Other Staffers Help on the Web?

All TV	34.4%
Markets 1-25	24.0
Markets 26-50	19.9
Markets 51-100	37.3
Markets 101-150	41.4
Markets 151+	41.5
All Radio	64.1%
Major Market	16.7
Large Market	31.2
Medium Market	65.5
Small Market	76.1

In TV, the percentage of news staffers with responsibilities edged up from last year (32.5 percent to 34.4 percent). Most categories rose, but stations in the two largest market groupings have markedly fewer of their news people helping on

the web. Fox and other commercial stations are also well behind all the others in news staff participation in the web. There are no regional differences. In radio, far more staff members shared web responsibilities than a year ago, although all of that growth was in medium and small markets.

News Director Role with Web Site

	In Charge	In Charge of News Content Only	No Management Role/Other
All TV	20.3%	64.6%	15.1%
Markets 1-25	40.0	45.0	15.0
Markets 26-50	20.0	52.0	28.0
Markets 51-100	16.2	75.0	8.9
Markets 101-150	15.3	73.6	11.1
Markets 151+	17.1	65.9	17.0
All Radio	25.0%	35.7%	39.3%
Major Market	20.0	40.0	40.0
Large Market	13.3	40.0	46.7
Medium Market	33.3	28.2	38.5
Small Market	22.9	39.6	37.5

This is the second year in a row with significant changes in the TV numbers on the role of news directors and the web. Stations with the largest news staffs are—by far—the most likely to have the news director in charge overall, and huge jumps in markets 1 – 50 have boosted the overall percentage of news directors in charge from 15.6 percent last year to 20.3 percent this year. At the same time, the percentage of news directors with no management role dropped in half—from 31.2 percent to 15.1 percent. There are few differences by affiliation, except that Fox affiliates are less likely to have the news director in charge and more likely to have news directors with no role in web management. So are stations in the Midwest. In radio, the percentage of news directors in charge of just news content dropped, while the percentage in charge overall and those with no management responsibilities at all both rose. That was true, in varying degrees, across all market sizes. News directors at non-commercial stations were the least likely to be in charge overall.

TV Station Website Traffic During the Past 30 Days

	Page Views (in millions)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All TV	7.9	184.5
Market Size		
1-25	19.0	331.8
26-50	16.1	247.0
51-100	1.5	114.1
101-150	3.3	90.7
151+	0.3	81.5

Web traffic numbers are erratically higher this year than last, but comparisons are difficult. This is only the second year in which we had enough news directors reporting numbers to make the figures reliable. Web traffic breaks down between those with 31 or more news employees—which have a lot of traffic at their websites—and those with smaller staffs—which have very little traffic. We have dropped the reporting of hits because too few news directors reported the numbers that way, and it’s a poor measure of web traffic. Perhaps reflecting the high percentage of radio news directors with limited web responsibilities, the number of radio news directors reporting web traffic is too small to be at all reliable.

Anybody Making Money?

	Profit	Breaking Even	Loss	Don't Know
All TV	24.0%	12.2%	13.0%	50.8%
Markets 1-25	35.9	5.1	12.8	46.2
Markets 26-50	30.0	8.0	6.0	56.0
Markets 51-100	24.6	15.4	13.8	46.2
Markets 101-150	17.4	11.6	21.7	49.3
Markets 151+	15.4	20.5	5.1	59.0
All Radio	4.2%	20.0%	10.5%	65.3%
Major Market	12.5	0	0	87.5
Large Market	9.1	27.3	9.1	54.5
Medium Market	0	24.2	9.1	66.7
Small Market	4.7	18.6	14.0	62.8

Money is where we see the biggest change in TV websites from a year ago. The percentage making a profit rose from last year’s 15.1 to this year’s 24 percent—and every single market group went up. The percentage breaking even fell from

last year (20.2 percent to 12.2 percent) and the percentage of those that lost money also fell (from 17.2 percent to 13 percent). As with profit, every market size fell in both breaking even and loss. The percentage of news directors who didn't know remained around 50 percent. It's not completely consistent, but generally, the larger the news staff, the more likely the station to make a profit on the web and the less likely to lose money. Generally, the smaller the staff, the less likely for the news director to know whether the web site makes a profit. There were not big differences by network affiliation, although NBC affiliates were a little more likely to report making money on the web, and Fox affiliates were a little less likely. Stations in the South were more likely to report a profit than any other region—and less likely to report losing money on the web. In radio, the percentage of stations reporting a profit or a loss remained the same. The stations reporting breaking even rose, but all of that increase came from don't know – which is still two-thirds of all radio news directors.

Bob Papper is professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Data entry and tabulation were done by the Bureau of Business Research at Ball State. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio Television News Directors Association.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2005 among all 1,617 operating, non-satellite television stations. Calls are still being made to all U.S. radio stations, with surveys sent to all radio news directors—in addition to a random sample of 1,200 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,120 television stations (69.3 percent) and, so far, 139 radio news directors and general managers representing 450 radio stations.