

Web Savvy Survey

Station websites are growing, but are the website staffs?

By Bob Papper

The latest RTNDA/Ball State University Survey shows the first meaningful changes in radio and television station website numbers in the last three years, reflecting growth in complexity and content and, in the case of television, staffing.

In television, station websites are now virtually universal with radio headed that way except in the smallest markets. Even there, the numbers are starting to catch up. The percentages of stations with websites increased from a year ago—television rose by 4 percent and radio by more than 8. Group-owned stations and noncommercial stations were more likely to have websites than independents and commercial stations.

On average, 94 percent of all television station websites include news versus 77 percent of all radio station websites. The big change here is in radio. Television websites are just as likely to have news as a year ago, and just about the only hold-outs are stations with the smallest news staffs. This year's radio figures represent a 35 percent jump from last year. All market sizes increased, and there was no difference between group-owned or independent stations.

Elements of Local News Websites

Television	Text	Still Pictures	Audio	Streaming Audio	Live Camera	Video
All Television:	96.4%	70.9%	35.1%	36.7%	27.5%	38.6%
Markets 1–25	100.0	75.8	48.5	54.5	27.3	45.5
Markets 26–50	93.3	73.3	51.1	42.2	46.7	53.3
Markets 51–100	94.4	77.5	35.2	33.8	28.2	33.8
Markets 101–150	100.0	64.3	21.4	26.8	21.4	32.1
Markets 151+	95.7	63.0	26.1	34.8	15.2	34.8
Radio						
All Radio:	96.0%	36.9%	26.2%	32.3%	1.5%	4.6%
Major Market	100.0	60.0	70.0	70.0	10.0	10.0%
Large Market	92.3	30.8	30.8	30.8	0	0
Medium Market	95.0	45.0	25.0	30.0	0	5.0
Small Market	90.9	22.7	4.5	18.2	0	4.5

Gone are the days of simple text sites. Both television and radio websites are growing in complexity, with radio seeing big jumps in still pictures and audio and a huge jump in streaming audio.

What Do Users Want From Your Site?

Rank	All Television This Year	All Television Last Year	All Radio This Year	All Radio Last Year
1	Local weather	Local weather	Local news	Local news
2	Local news	Local news	Local weather	Local weather
3	Headlines	Health	Local sports	Other information
4	Local sports	Traffic	Other information	Live cameras
5	Weather elsewhere	Weather elsewhere	Talent bios	Traffic
6	Health	Headlines	National news	Weather elsewhere
7	Education	Live cameras	Entertainment news	Entertainment news
8	Traffic	Local sports	Headlines	Local sports
9	National news	Education	International news	International news
10	Other information	Other information	Sports elsewhere	Food
11	Talent bios	Food	Traffic	Health
12	Entertainment news	Consumer news	Money	Talent bios
13	Sports elsewhere	National news	Food	Headlines
14	Food	Entertainment news	Weather elsewhere	National news
15	Live cameras	Talent bios	Health	Education
16	Consumer news	Sports elsewhere	Education	Sports elsewhere
17	International news	Money	Live cameras	Consumer news
18	Money	International news	Consumer news	Money

For the fourth year in a row in television, local weather and local news top the list. More popular this year in television: headlines, local sports, education, national news and talent bios. For the third year in a row in radio, local news and local weather are one and two, respectively. More popular this year in radio: local sports, talent bios, national news, headlines, sports elsewhere and money.

Staffing the Website

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All Television	1.45	1.71	3.16
Markets 1–25	2.50	0.42	2.92
Markets 26–50	1.32	1.51	2.84
Markets 51–100	0.96	1.91	2.88
Markets 101–150	0.86	1.65	2.51
Markets 151+	2.27	2.64	4.91
All Radio	1.11	1.04	2.15
Major Market	1.36	0.55	1.91
Large Market	1.07	1.60	2.67
Medium Market	0.96	1.04	2.00
Small Market	1.21	0.87	2.08

In television, stations added about half a person to the typical website staff in the past year—evenly split between full-time and part-time. Stations in the South had the largest full-time staffs, and stations in the Midwest had more part-time employees. Radio web staffing remained unchanged from a year ago. There were no staff differences based on whether the station was part of a group or independent.

Helping Staff the Website

All Television	32.5%
Markets 1–25	20.6
Markets 26–50	20.1
Markets 51–100	32.0
Markets 101–150	44.1
Markets 151+	39.5
All Radio	51.5%
Major Market	31.9
Large Market	52.5
Medium Market	52.1
Small Market	62.4

Almost two-thirds (64.9 percent) of television news directors say their staff just makes the news available to the website—rather than working on the site itself. In radio, 22.4 percent of radio news directors say the staff just makes the news content available for the web—more commonly in the larger markets.

News Director Role With Website

	In Charge	In Charge of News Content Only	No Management Role/Other
All Television	15.6%	53.2%	31.2%
Markets 1-25	18.2	45.5	36.3
Markets 26-50	4.4	60.0	35.6
Markets 51-100	16.9	50.7	32.4
Markets 101-150	14.5	52.7	32.7
Markets 151+	23.9	56.5	19.5
All Radio	13.1%	54.8%	32.2%
Major Market	15.4	53.8	30.8
Large Market	5.9	64.7	29.4
Medium Market	10.0	46.7	43.3
Small Market	20.8	58.3	20.8

While a majority of television news directors are in charge of the news content on their website, the percentage is down 10 percent from a year ago. At the same time, news directors are less likely to be in charge overall—down noticeably from a year ago—and more than twice as likely to have no management role at all. Although the change is more pronounced in larger markets, the change is present across the board. There is a similar shift in radio as well. Radio news directors at independent stations are a little more likely to oversee the station website and the news on the web than news directors at group-owned stations.

Television Station Website Traffic During the Past 30 Days

	Hits (in millions)	Page Views (in millions)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All Television	2.3	6.1	206.8
Markets 1-25	6.7	22.2	476.8
Markets 26-50	5.4	7.7	325.5
Markets 51-100	1.2	1.4	116.6
Markets 101-150	1.8	0.6	77.0
Markets 151+	0.7	0.2	30.1

Each year we ask about web traffic, but the number of news directors reporting this data is well below other parts of the survey, so view these figures with some caution. Hits refers to the number of elements on websites that someone comes in contact with. Page views refers to the number of pages that are fully loaded (regardless of the number of elements on the page). Consequently, the number of hits (a term used less and less frequently to measure web activity) should be far greater than the more common measure of page views. It isn't here because most news directors either responded with hits or page views but not both. Too few radio news directors responded to this question to be able to report the results.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2004 among all 1,624 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,509 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,223 television stations (75.3 percent) and 103 radio news directors and general managers representing 417 radio stations.

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Anybody Making Money?

	Profit	Breaking Even	Loss	Don't Know
All Television	15.1%	20.2%	17.2%	47.5%
Markets 1-25	23.3	13.3	13.3	50.0
Markets 26-50	21.4	21.4	7.1	50.0
Markets 51-100	13.2	26.5	26.5	33.8
Markets 101-150	10.9	14.5	21.8	52.7
Markets 151+	11.6	20.9	9.3	58.1
All Radio	4.7%	5.9%	10.6%	78.8%
Major Market	0	0	15.4	84.6
Large Market	11.8	11.8	0	76.5
Medium Market	3.3	10.0	16.7	70.0
Small Market	4.0	0	8.0	88.0

It's not a major shift, but the percentage of television stations making money on the web edged up a percent from a year ago; the percentage breaking even rose 2 percent; and the percentage showing a loss dropped by 3 percent. The positive moves are all in the larger markets. There was a very slight increase in the stations reporting a profit, a 3 percent drop in breaking even, and no change in loss. Overall, television websites are continuing to edge upward, and radio websites are continuing to stay flat. The result is a widening gap in the profit picture between television and radio websites.