



News, Staffing and Profitability Survey

Latest research shows overall growth with caution in planning.

By Bob Papper

Overall, the past year was a strong one for the amount of both news and staff, but there are some cautionary signs in the latest RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey.

The total amount of local TV news time per week remains at record levels. Staffing grew slightly again, although it's still below the peak of 2000.

Generally, the biggest television stations got bigger, but the picture was mixed for many others.

Even as staffing rose to its second highest level ever, fewer TV news directors expect to see more news or more staff in the coming year. There was also a big drop in news profitability, although only a small decrease in the percentage of revenue that news brings in to the typical station.

The total number of TV stations originating local news rose by four to 778. Despite the attention given to stations that have dropped local news, there has actually been a net increase every year we've tracked the number. Another 81 stations get local news from one of the 778, up 13 from a year ago.

Consolidation in radio and the accompanying changes in the survey to accommodate that consolidation make it difficult to track changes in radio over time. After a drop last year, staffing and news numbers returned to nearly the levels of two years ago. Part of the problem in attempting to compare the data is that, every year, radio news directors oversee the news on more and more stations. This year, the typical radio news director oversaw four stations—that's up a full station from a year ago.

Staff Size Changes

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the Same	Don't Know
Television				
All Television	29.2%	18.8%	41.3%	10.7%
Big 4 Affiliates	33.2	18.5	41.2	7.1
Other Commercial	8.6	25.7	28.6	37.1
Radio				
All Radio	22.9%	65.6%	11.5%	0

Television : Overall, two-thirds of TV news staffs increased in number or remained the same. News departments at ABC stations were most likely to hold even, and non-network affiliates commonly downsized.

Radio: Noncommercial news operations are more than twice as likely to have added staff as commercial stations.

Planned Staff Changes

	Will Increase	Will Decrease	Will Remain the Same	Don't Know
Television				
All Television	22.3%	10.3%	48.0%	19.4%
Big 4 Affiliates	23.5	8.9	53.5	14.1
Other Commercial	5.7	22.9	17.1	54.3
Radio				
All Radio	10.3	76.3	1.0	12.4

Television : Almost half of the stations expect to hold staff size steady next year. The bigger the market, the more likely it is to expect planned growth. **Radio**: Noncommercial news operations are much more likely to plan future staff increases. The biggest markets are also more likely to plan staff growth.

Newsroom Staff Size

	Average full-time	Median full-time	Maximum full-time	Average part-time	Median part-time	Maximum part-time	Average total staff	Median total	Maximum total staff
Television									
All TV	35.0	30.0	155	4.8	3.0	105	39.8	34.0	175
Big 4 Affiliates	37.3	31.0	155	5.0	3.0	105	42.4	36.0	175
Other Commercial	34.3	28.5	100	4.6	3.5	22	38.9	33.5	100
Market size:									
1-25	56.6	56.0	155	8.7	7.0	34	65.3	64.0	175
26-50	51.2	51.5	120	5.4	4.0	21	56.6	59.0	125
51-100	36.6	36.0	100	4.2	3.0	21	40.8	42.0	100
101-150	24.0	26.0	43	4.6	1.5	105	28.7	28.5	120
151+	17.7	20.0	48	2.8	2.0	12	20.5	21.5	58
Radio									
All radio	3.0	2.0	14	1.6	1.0	21	4.6	3.0	25
Market size:									
Major	7.4	7.0	14	3.3	1.5	11	10.7	8.5	25
Large	3.9	4.0	11	1.8	1.0	6	5.7	5.0	13
Medium	2.1	2.0	7	1.8	1.0	21	3.9	3.0	22
Small	1.7	1.5	3	0.7	0.0	3	2.4	1.5	6

Television: The median staff size in TV news stayed the same as a year ago, but the average rose by 3.1 percent. That's the second-highest staffing level ever. Employment growth was inconsistent across markets, going up slightly in markets 1-25, 101-150 and 150+ but dropping a fraction in markets 26-50 and 51-100. The use of part-timers held steady. Historically, Fox-affiliated newsrooms have been smaller than other network affiliates, but the difference is now insignificant. Newsrooms in the Northeast tend to be bigger, and newsrooms in the West tend to be smaller.

Radio: Last year, we said that radio news staff size had fallen sharply, but that a change in how we gathered the data because of consolidation could have caused the appearance of a drop. This year, the numbers are back nearly to the levels of two years ago. On the other hand, those people handle news on more stations, so comparisons are difficult.



News Director Age

While the age of TV news directors this year ranged from 24 to 70, the average and median came in at 44. In 1998, the average and median were 41. Market size, staff size, network affiliation and geography don't alter the number more than two to three years one way or the other.

Typically, news directors have held that position at that station for about three years, although the average is 4.52—brought up by some long-term news directors. Longevity also doesn't vary much by staff size, network affiliation or region, but news directors in the very largest markets have been news director a shorter time than those in other market sizes.

Number of Stations Radio News Directors Oversee

One	26.8%
Two-Three	18.6
Four	16.5
Five-Six	19.6
Seven-Eight	18.6
Average	3.75
Median	4.0
Maximum	8

Radio news directors aren't much different, with the average and median age at 42. Again, market size, staff size and region make little difference. The news directors at independent, rather than group-owned stations tend to be slightly younger at 38 years old.

What Else Do Radio News Directors Do?

Announcing (including sports and weather)	27.7%
Public Affairs	23.1
Production	13.8
Talk show host	13.8
Operations	13.8
Program Director	7.7
General Manager	6.2
Other	24.6

Two-thirds of radio news directors report that they also have other responsibilities at the station. That's actually down from nearly three-quarters last year.

News Profitability

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
Television									
Showing profit	44.5%	58.4%	55.3%	54.9%	56%	58%	57%	63%	62%
Breaking even	24.2	10.4	13.6	11.6	13	11	9	11	6
Showing loss	12.1	9.2	9.2	11.2	10	11	11	10	8
Don't know	19.2	22.0	21.9	22.3	21	20	23	16	24
Radio									
Showing profit	19.6	22.5	25.2	15.2	17	25	19	22	23
Breaking even	14.4	17.1	13.8	13.9	17	15	18	14	20
Showing loss	3.1	7.2	2.4	7.3	0	7	6	6	6
Don't know	62.9	53.2	58.6	63.6	66	53	57	58	51

Television: The biggest change in 2005 is the movement from showing profit to breaking even, and it is a major shift from past surveys. We cannot compare these numbers before 1997 because the wording of the question changed. **Radio:** Most radio news directors don't monitor radio news profitability.

Percentage of TV Revenue Produced by News

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
All Television	42.8%	45.0%	12.0%	75.0%
Market size:				
1-25	37.9	40.0	12.0	60.0
26-50	40.7	40.0	20.0	75.0
51-100	42.8	45.0	19.0	63.0
101-150	47.1	50.0	26.0	65.0
151+	43.3	50.0	12.0	60.0

The percentage of station revenue from news dropped to 42.8 percent from last year's 46.1 percent. But last year's figure was way up from the year before at 39.7 percent, and this year's number is higher than it has been for five of the last eight years that we've asked this question.

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. Data for the number of stations originating local news and getting it from others are based on a complete census and are not projected from a smaller sample.

Bob Papper is professor of telecommunications at Ball State University. 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.

TV News Budgets

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the Same	Don't Know
All Television	44.2%	19.2%	26.0%	10.6%
Big 4 Affiliates	49.3	16.4	27.5	6.8
Other Commercial	11.4	37.1	17.1	34.3
Market size:				
1-25	50.0	13.9	27.8	8.3
26-50	59.6	14.9	14.9	10.6
51-100	45.9	21.6	25.7	6.8
101-150	37.7	18.0	27.9	16.4
151+	29.8	25.5	34.0	10.6

Television news budgets were most likely to go up, but fewer of them rose in the past year (13.7 percent) and more were likely to decrease (39.1 percent) than a year ago. Again, non-network affiliates led the retreat. Budgets in the smallest markets were least likely to go up, while budgets for the largest newsrooms were most likely to increase. ABC affiliates were far less likely to increase than others, but there was no budget pattern by region.

Amount of News

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the Same	Don't Know
Television				
All Television	29.7%	10.6%	59.0%	0.7
Big 4 Affiliates	32.4	9.4	57.7	0.5
Other Commercial	2.9	22.9	71.4	2.9
Market size:				
1-25	36.1	2.8	61.1	0
26-50	31.3	16.7	52.1	0
51-100	31.2	9.1	59.7	0
101-150	25.8	16.1	58.1	0
151+	26.0	6.0	64.0	4.0
Radio				
All Radio	40.2	50.5	7.2	2.1

Television: Almost 60 percent of TV news directors reported keeping the amount of news steady last year. **Radio:** There were no significant differences based on commercial/noncommercial, staff size, market size or region. Group-owned stations were less likely to have increased the amount of news last year and more likely to have cut it back.

For additional information from this survey, see this month's issue of Communicator at www.rtnda.org.

Advertisers

Many thanks to the companies and organizations that advertise in Communicator.

ADVERTISER	URL	PAGE	PHONE
615 Music	www.615music.com	11	888.615.8729
AccuWeather	www.accuweather.com	13	814.235.8630
Autocue	www.autocue.com	45	800.293.0118
American Institute of Physics	www.aip.org	27	301.209.3100
AP Broadcast	www.apbroadcast.com	27	202.736.1152
Avid Technology	www.avid.com	25	800.949.2843
Baystor	www.baystor.com	41	888.229.7867
Burli	www.burli.com	47	604.684.3140
Dart Center	www.dartcenter.org	19	800.332.0565
Devlin Design Group	www.ddgtv.com	17	970.668.2772
FX Group	www.fxgroup.tv	C3	407.877.9600
JVC Professional	www.jvc.com/pro	33	800.582.5825
Newsroom Solutions	www.newsroomsolutions.com	7	704.543.0191
Non-Stop Music Productions	www.nonstopmusic.com	43	801.531.0060
Panasonic	www.panasonic.com/broadcast	15	800.528.8601
PR Newswire	www.prnewswire.com	49	800.832.5522
RF Central	www.rfcentral.com	10	717.249.4900
Stephen Arnold Music	www.stephenarnoldmusic.com	C4	214.726.1010
VDO	www.vdo.tv	C2-1	727.631.0709
Weather Central	www.weathercentral.tv	2	608.274.5789
Weather Data	www.weatherdata.com	37	316.265.9127
Weather Metrics	www.weathermetrics.com	31	913.438.7666
WSI Corp.	www.wsicorp.com	20-21	978.670.5000

Call Rich Harless at 202.467.5258 for more information about advertising in Communicator.

RTNDA Communicator

THE MAGAZINE FOR ELECTRONIC JOURNALISTS

Statement of Ownership

1. Publication title: RTNDA Communicator. 2. Publication number: 1529-3106. 3. Filing date: September 8, 2005. 4. Issue frequency: Monthly, except bimonthly in July/August. 5. Number of issues published annually: 11. 6. Annual subscription price: \$75. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 1600 K St., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006-2838. 8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher: 1600 K St., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006-2838. 9. Publisher: Radio-Television News Directors Association, 1600 K St., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006-2838. Editor-in-Chief: Noreen Welle, Radio-Television News Directors Association, 1600 K St., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006-2838. Managing Editor: Sarah Stump, Radio-Television News Directors Association, 1600 K St., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006-2838. 10. Owner: Radio-Television News Directors Association, 1600 K St., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006-2838. 11. Known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders: None. 12. Tax status: Unchanged. 13. Publication title: RTNDA Communicator. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: July/August 2005. 15a. Total number of copies (average of 12 months, single issue) 4076, 3774. 15b. Paid and/or requested circulation: 3085, 3054. 15c. Total paid and/or requested circulation: 3085, 3054. 15d. Free distribution by mail: 375, 380. 15e. Free distribution outside the mail: 400, 200. 15f. Total free distribution: 775, 580. 15g. Total distribution: 3860, 3634. 15h. Copies not distributed: 216, 140. 15i. Total: 4076, 3774. 15j. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 79.9%, 84%. 16. Publication of statement of ownership: October 2005. 17. Signed: Noreen Welle, Editor-in-Chief, September 8, 2005.