

TV Websites Helping the Bottom Line

One in four television websites
are making a profit, up 9 percent
from last year. **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.

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 | Consumer news | Local weather |
| 3 | Money | Headlines | Other information | Local sports |
| 4 | Other information | Local sports | Local weather | Other information |
| 5 | Entertainment news | 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 |

Television: For the fifth year in a row, local weather and local news lead the way, but there are quite a few changes below that. Money shot up from last place at the end of 2004 to third place this time around. Sports fared poorly, with local sports slipping from fourth to seventh and sports elsewhere dropping from 13th to 17th. At number 11 in the ranking, international news placed the highest in the past three years, up from 17th last year and 18th the year before.

Radio: Local news remained on top, but local weather slipped two places to fourth, and local sports dropped five places to eighth. Consumer news shot up from the bottom last year to second this time.

Elements of Local News Websites

| Television | Text | Still Pictures | Audio | Streaming Audio | Live Camera | Video |
|-----------------------|-------|----------------|-------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| All Television | 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 |
| 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 |
| 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 |

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

Radio: Overall, the radio figures are little changed from a year ago, and there were few consistent patterns in the numbers.

Staffing the Website

| | Full-time | Part-time | Total |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| All Television | 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 |

Television: Web staffs rose another half a person or so in the past 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.

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.

News Director Role with Website

| | In Charge | In Charge of News Content Only | No Management Role/Other |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| All Television | 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 |

Television: This is the second year in a row with significant changes in the television 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.

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.

Television Station Website Traffic During the Past 30 Days

| | Page Views (in millions) | Unique Visitors (in thousands) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| All Television | 7.9 | 184.5 |
| Markets 1–25 | 19.0 | 331.8 |
| Markets 26–50 | 16.1 | 247.0 |
| Markets 51–100 | 1.5 | 114.1 |
| Markets 101–150 | 3.3 | 190.7 |
| Markets 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. The number of radio news directors reporting web traffic is too small to be at all reliable.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Annual 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.

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Helping Staff the Website

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| All Television | 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 |

Television: The percentage of news staffers with web 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 newspeople 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.

Radio: Far more staff members shared web responsibilities than a year ago, although all of that growth was in medium and small markets.

Making Money?

| | Profit | Breaking Even | Loss | Don't Know |
|-----------------------|--------|---------------|-------|------------|
| All Television | 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 |

Television: Money is where we see the biggest change in television 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 website 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.

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 the "don't know" column, the response of two-thirds of all radio news directors.