



2012 TV and Radio News Staffing and Profitability Survey

Part II: A Record Amount of TV News...Again

By Bob Papper

- *The amount of TV news sets a new record.*
- *News directors project it'll happen again next year.*
- *TV and radio news directors on what's happening with the news audience.*

For the fourth year in a row, the latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found **that the average television station set a new record for the amount of local news aired.** Over those last four years, the average amount of weekday news has gone from 4:36 to 5:00 to 5:18 last year. This year, it's up another 12 minutes to five and a half hours per weekday. The average network affiliate is even higher at 5:48.

Hours of Local TV News Per Day – 2012

	Average weekday	Median weekday	Weekday maximum	Average Saturday	Median Saturday	Saturday maximum	Average Sunday	Median Sunday	Sunday maximum
All TV news	5.5	5.0	42.5	1.8	1.0	7.0	1.8	1.0	6.0
Big four affiliates	5.8	5.0	42.5	1.9	1.5	7.0	1.9	1.5	6.0
Other commercial	2.9	1.0	15.0	0.6	0.5	2.0	0.6	0.5	2.0
Market size:									
1-25	6.1	5.5	36.5	2.5	2.0	7.0	2.5	2.0	6.0
26-50	6.9	5.5	42.5	2.4	2.0	5.5	2.3	2.0	5.0
51-100	6.1	5.0	37.5	2.0	1.8	5.5	2.0	1.5	5.5
101-150	4.9	4.5	22.5	1.2	1.0	6.0	1.2	1.0	3.0
151+	3.6	3.5	5.5	1.0	1.0	2.0	0.9	1.0	2.0
Staff size:									
Staff 51+	8.5	6.0	42.5	3.0	3.0	7.0	3.0	3.0	6.0
Staff 31-50	5.7	5.0	28.8	1.9	1.5	4.5	1.9	1.5	4.5
Staff 21-30	4.9	4.5	22.5	1.2	1.0	3.0	1.1	1.0	3.0
Staff 11-20	3.5	3.5	6.5	0.8	1.0	2.0	0.8	0.5	2.0
Staff 1-10	1.0	1.0	2.0	0.2	0	1.0	0.1	0	1.0

Affiliation:									
ABC	5.0	5.0	22.5	1.9	1.5	5.5	1.9	1.5	6.0
CBS	6.8	5.0	42.5	1.8	1.5	5.5	1.7	1.0	6.0
Fox	6.5	7.0	10.5	1.9	1.5	5.5	2.0	1.5	5.5
NBC	5.6	5.0	30.0	2.0	1.5	7.0	2.0	1.5	6.0
PBS	0.8	0.5	2.0	0.2	0	1.0	0.2	0	1.0

I've added the median (or typical) number this year, but you can see how close the average and the median are. What that means is that it's not simply a matter of a few stations bringing up the average; the typical TV station is running five hours of local news per weekday. Generally, the bigger the market and the bigger the news staff, the more news a station is likely to run and the more likely that it went up from last year.

The weekend went up as well. Saturday and Sunday news time rose an average of 6 minutes each. Almost half of all TV stations say they increased the amount of news that they run, and few stations cut back.

Amount of News Changes - The Past Year

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV News	45.4%	1.5%	52.5%	0.6%
Big four affiliates	45.8	1.3	52.2	0.7
Other commercial	48.0	0	52.0	0
Market size:				
1-25	56.1	0	43.9	0
26-50	52.2	6.5	41.3	0
51-100	48.5	1.0	50.5	0
101-150	41.0	1.2	56.6	1.2
151+	28.0	0	70.0	2.0

A slim majority of stations said they ran the same amount of news in 2011 as in 2010, but more than 45% reported running more news. That increase wasn't uniform across the board. The smallest newsrooms (1-10 staffers) and the smallest markets (151+) were much less likely to say they increased the amount of news. Fox affiliates were the most likely to have added news, followed by CBS stations and other commercial stations. NBC and ABC affiliates lagged well behind the others, and non-commercial stations lagged well behind that. Stations in the West were a lot less likely to increase news than stations elsewhere.

Changes in Newscasts in the Past Year

	Added a newscast	Cut a newscast	No change
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All TV news	42.4%	3.9%	53.7%
Big four affiliates	43.3	3.6	53.1
Other commercial	47.4	0	52.6
Market			
1 – 25	57.4	1.9	40.7
26 – 50	46.2	7.7	46.1
51 – 100	50.0	4.5	45.5
101 – 150	34.2	5.3	60.5
151+	21.3	0	78.7
Staff size			
51+	48.4	0	51.6
31 – 50	49.4	3.9	46.7
21 – 30	33.3	1.8	64.9
11 – 20	28.6	7.1	64.3
1 – 10	19.0	9.5	71.5

Virtually all the numbers on adding a newscast are up versus last year, and virtually all the numbers on cutting newscasts are down from a year ago. Generally, stations with the smallest staffs (1 - 10) were more likely to cut news than the others. CBS and Fox stations were most likely to both add and cut newscasts, reflecting a reconfiguration of news that still represents an overall increase.

News directors noted 148 news programs added to the schedule ... along with 11 cutbacks. Overall, the newscast expansion winner was weekday mornings between 5 am - 9 am, with 28% of the stations that added news expanding in that time. That barely edged out 4:30 am at 20% ... which wasn't far ahead of late afternoon (4 pm - 5 pm) at 16%. Thirteen percent of those stations reported adding a late newscast (9 pm and later), and 10% added an early evening newscast (5 pm to 7:30 pm). Weekend morning came in just behind that at 9%, followed by weekend evening at six. One to 3 stations added news at 4 a.m., mid morning, noon and mid evening.

More than half the cutbacks were in the early evening. Then it was one or two scattered across 4 pm, mid evening, morning and weekend morning.

Amount of News Planned - The Next Year – 2012

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV news	31.2%	0	60.2%	8.6%
Big four affiliates	31.7	0	60.4	7.9
Other	28.0	0	60.0	12.0

commercial				
Market size:				
1-25	36.8	0	56.1	7.0
26-50	34.8	0	47.8	17.4
51-100	27.7	0	64.4	7.9
101-150	31.3	0	62.7	6.0
151+	28.0	0	64.0	8.0

The percentage of stations expecting to increase news this year is actually down by about 5 points from the previous year. Fox affiliates again lead the list of expected increases. The percentage of news directors expecting to cut news has always been low, but this is the first time since 1997 that it's been zero. Not a single TV news director expects to cut back on news in 2012.

A new question this year asked news directors to characterize the audience trend for news by time of day.

Is the TV news audience on your station going up, down or remaining stable?

	Going up	Going down	Stable
Morning	71.3%	3.1%	25.6%
Noon	18.9	10.2	70.9
Late afternoon/early evening	44.1	12.5	43.4
Late news	41.7	19.3	39.0
Overall	51.8	7.5	40.8

There were few meaningful differences based on market size, staff size, affiliation or region, but there were a couple. Stations in the Northeast were about 10 points less likely to say their late news audience was going up than the rest of the country, and about 5 points more likely to say the late audience was going down. Overall, Fox news directors were 5 - 10 points more likely to report that their overall station news audience was dropping than other affiliate news directors.

We'll have to watch this over time to get a sense of what's taking place.

Radio News

Radio news changed relatively little again. The amount of news on the air is higher than a year ago, but we had quite a few all news and mostly news stations in the survey this year. They raised the average, but the median (typical) amount of news stayed about the same.

Overall in the survey, 68.9% of radio stations run local news -- 69.0% of AM stations and 73.2% of FM stations. The overall percentage is down 1.6% from last year, with AM stations down about 5 points and FM stations up about 4. I would urge caution on those numbers. The numbers are based on stations that return the survey, and since it's a news survey, stations that run news could well be more likely to return the surveys than stations that do not. It's possible those percentages are too high. That concern is why I resisted issuing the numbers in the past, but I'm again at least reporting what I found in the survey because I'm so frequently asked about this.

Average and Median Hours of Locally-Produced Radio News – 2012

	All radio	Major market	Large market	Medium market	Small market
Weekday average	5.4	7.4	6.6	5.7	3.5
Weekday median	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.0	2.0
Saturday average	1.3	2.6	0.6	1.0	1.3
Saturday median	0	0	0	0	0.3
Sunday average	1.0	2.8	0.5	0.8	0.8
Sunday median	0	0	0	0	0

The radio survey received a major overhaul in 2012, and this question was one of the major changes. In the past, some of the answers to questions suggested that different people were reading the questions in different ways, so I changed a number of questions to try to get better and more consistent answers. It appears that that worked, but the tradeoff is that it's a lot harder (or in some cases impossible) to compare this year's answers to previous years. Note that these numbers represent amount of news per newsroom -- not news per station.

This question is part of that. In the past, I asked about minutes of news by daypart. Unfortunately, I got some erratic answers, and a lot of news directors clearly tired of all the blanks that had to be filled out. In some cases, I felt that some news directors filled out weekday numbers per weekday while others answered for a cumulative week. This year, I asked hours of news per typical weekday as well as Saturday and Sunday. The table above now includes both average (mean) and median (typical) time. This year, I heard from a lot more all news and mostly news stations than usual. That's why there's such a big difference between average and median. This year's median is fairly close to last year's numbers.

Commercial stations produced more than twice as much news as non-commercial ones. Generally, the bigger the staff, the more stations there were in a local group and the bigger the market ... all tended to result in more news. Stations in the Midwest averaged more news than stations elsewhere in the country.

Changes in Radio News in the Last 12 Months and Planned for the Future – 2012

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
Amount of news the past year	30.1%	4.9%	64.5%	0.5%
Plan to change amount of news next year	25.4	0	66.9	7.7

All of these numbers are almost identical to last year. There are few consistent patterns, but non-commercial stations were more likely to increase local news than commercial stations, and stations with larger staffs and stations in the West were more likely to increase news. Not a single news director reported plans to decrease local news. Non-commercial stations, the very largest stations and the largest markets were most likely to expect to increase the amount of news.

Just over one in five news directors (21.5%) said they added a newscast last year. Those additions were most likely to be in morning drive, followed by afternoon drive and then overall.

Just over 10% of radio news directors (10.2%) reported cutting a newscast last year. Those cuts tended not to concentrate in any particular area more than another.

Number of Stations Where the Radio News Director Oversees the News – 2012

No. of Stations	Percentage
One	40.8%
Two	21.8
Three	15.0
Four	8.3
Five	6.3
Six	3.9
Seven	1.5
Eight+	2.5
Overall	Number
Average	2.5 locally
Median	2
Maximum	10 locally + 30 elsewhere

The numbers here are sharply different from past years, with a huge spike in the percentage of news directors saying they oversee the news on just one station. However, the phrasing of the question changed this year, so a direct comparison is risky. It could be that I simply heard from more news directors at single stations, but it could also be a different interpretation by responding news directors. I should know the answer next year.

Where more than one related station ran news in a market, more than three-quarters of them (77.6%) had a centralized newsroom. That's up 8 points -- to its highest level ever.

What Else Radio News Directors Do – 2012

This year, 67.5% of radio news directors said they had other responsibilities at the station beyond news. That's down from last year and well below the all time record of 83.1% four years ago. But I also cracked down on what constituted "beyond news," since a lot of the answers looked like the usual things that I remember considering part of news when I worked in radio news. The smaller the market, the more likely for a news director to have other responsibilities.

What Else Radio News Directors Do?

Other job	Percentage
Announcing	28.9%
Sports	17.8
General Manager	16.7

Program Director	14.4
Public Affairs	12.2
Promotions	11.1
Production	11.1
Operations	11.1
News Anchor	10.0
x Sales	7.8
Other	6.7
Web	6.7
Talk show host	5.6
Education	5.3

Sports and Announcing swapped positions from a year ago, but otherwise, most of the numbers are fairly similar.

A new question this year asked news directors to characterize the audience trend for news by daypart.

Is the radio news audience on your station going up, down or remaining stable?

	Going up	Going down	Stable
Morning	52.6%	1.5%	45.9%
Midday	26.4	8.0	65.6
Afternoon	31.5	7.9	60.6
Evening	22.3	10.7	66.9
Overall	45.7	3.1	51.2

We'll have to watch this over time to get a sense of what's taking place.

Bob Papper is the Lawrence Stessin Distinguished Professor of Journalism and chair of the Department of Journalism, Media Studies, and Public Relations at Hofstra University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. This research was supported by the School of Communication at Hofstra University and the Radio Television Digital News Association.

About the Survey

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2011 among all 1,735 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,000 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,238 television stations (71.4%) and 260 radio news directors and general managers representing 743 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.

