TV News Directors

The typical TV news director is in the upper- or mid-40s, with average age at 47.8 and median 47. That's almost identical to last year, indicating some changes took place in newsroom leadership.

A year ago, news directors at Fox affiliates were about 3 years younger than those at other affiliates; this year, they're slightly older than the others.

Overall, news directors' ages range from 23 to 76. That's two years younger on the young end and six years older on the high end than in 2017.

TV News Director Tenure

The average TV news director has been news director at that station for 5.1 years – slightly up from last year – though the median remained at just 3. The longest serving news director at one station has been leading the same newsroom for an impressive 33 years, and is not alone in the 30+ club. More will qualify in the next couple years as well.

It used to be that durability averages (time spent as news director) went up as market size fell, but that hasn’t been the case for the last couple years. There is no consistent...
relationship between market size and time as news director. Markets 26 to 50 had the shortest average time (3.9 years), but markets 51 to 100 were the only markets with a median time below 3 (it was 2).

This year again saw a bit more news director turnover at Fox and CBS affiliates than the others and a little less in the West than other regions.

**TV News Director Careers**

![TV News Director Tenure Chart]

The average TV news director has been heading a newsroom for a total of 10.3 years with a median of 7. Both of those numbers are down a bit from a year ago. The longest serving news director had been in that role for 42 years, which edged out another who came in at 40.

Neither match last year’s top two spots of 44 and 43 years respectively, so at least a couple of long-time news directors either retired or didn’t fill out the survey this year.

Average experience varied inconsistently by market size, but all the medians were between 6 and 8 years with the title “news director.”

Average total time as news director was about 11 for staff sizes 21 and larger, but they were between 8 and 9 for smaller newsrooms.

News directors at NBC and Fox affiliates had about 3 years less total experience than news directors at ABC and CBS stations.
Radio News Directors

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found that radio news directors are getting a bit younger.

Radio News Director Ages

In the past, radio news directors were a little younger than those in TV, but that changed a year ago when radio news directors came in a little older than their TV counterparts. Not so this year. Overall, the average age in radio was 46.4, and the median was exactly 47. The average dropped by more than 2 years and the median fell by 4.

Commercial station news directors are about 8 years older than those at public stations. That difference is only slightly more than usual. Otherwise, there were no consistent relationships between age and market size or staff size, although news directors were younger in the Northeast than elsewhere.

Radio news director ages ranged from 17 years old up to 92. That's both the youngest and oldest that I can remember.
Radio News Director Tenure

Radio news directors have been in their current news director roles for an average of 8.9 years, but with a median tenure of 4.5, it's clear that some long-time news directors are bringing up the average.

Both numbers are down from a year ago. The average is down 1 but the median plunged by 1.5. That’s a big change in one year for a median number. Either there’s been a fair amount of turnover in radio news directors or a fair amount of turnover in who’s filling out the survey.

One news director has been at the same station for 40 years, and several are close to that.

Non-commercial news directors have been at their stations a little less time than their commercial counterparts, but no other groupings showed any consistent variability.

Radio News Director Careers

Radio news directors’ experience isn’t just at one station. The average radio news director has held the title for 12.1 years; the median was 8. Both of those numbers are down. The average is down two and a half points, and the median is down 4 points.

News directors at commercial stations have, on average, 4 years more total experience than non-commercial news directors; the median difference is 5 years.

There is absolutely no pattern by market size, staff size, group size, etc. News directors in the Midwest tended to have more experience, and news directors in the Northeast tended to have less.
Radio News Director Duties

Overall, just over two-thirds (69.9%) of radio news directors report that they’re full time station employees, leaving 30.1% as part time. Full time radio news directors are up 2 points from a year ago.

Commercial radio news directors are 3 points more likely to be full time than non-commercial news directors. That’s down from an 8-point spread a year ago and 14 points the year before that. All told, 32.5% of non-commercial news directors are part time compared to 29.3% of news directors at commercial stations.

Last year, the bigger the staff, the more likely that the news director was a full time employee. This year, that didn’t make any difference, and neither did any other variable. Note that the question asked whether the news director was a full time station employee – NOT whether the person was a full time news director.

Part time also applies to news director responsibilities. More than a third (34.4%) of radio news directors say that news is not their primary responsibility.

36.9% of news directors at commercial stations saying their primary station responsibility was not news versus 27.3% of non-commercial news directors. Those numbers are not dramatically changed from a year ago.

The smaller the staff size, the more likely that news was not the main responsibility. Major market news directors, at 44.2%, were more likely not to have news as their primary responsibility than other market sizes.
So if news isn’t the news director’s primary job, then what is?

Radio News Director Duties

- Non-management news tasks, 13%
- Other/Everything else, 1.3%
- Sports, 3.9%
- DJ, 5.2%
- There is no news director, 6.5%
- Billing and traffic, 6.5%
- Sales and production, 10.4%
- Program director, 15.6%
- Management and operations, 37.7%

For news directors whose primary responsibility was news, many report additional roles:

Radio News Director Additional Duties

- “Everything else”, 4.90%
- Board op. engineering, 3.5%
- Web and social media, 6.3%
- Air personality, DJ, anchor, 7.7%
- Advertising, sales, billing & traffic, 11.1%
- Management, 13.2%
- Sports, 13.2%
- Production, 13.9%
- Reporting, 26.4%
About the Survey
The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2017 among all 1,683 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,542 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,333 television stations (79.2%) and 415 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,110 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.

About Bob
Bob Papper is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Hofstra University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. This research was supported by the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication at Hofstra University and the Radio Television Digital News Association.