

## Business of News

An introductory note, if you will. 2019 marks my 25th year conducting the RTDNA (before that, RTNDA) Annual Survey. First at Ball State University and now at Hofstra University. It has been my privilege to do this, and I want to thank RTDNA, Ball State and Hofstra for the support and opportunity to keep this going. Most of all, I want to thank all of you who spend what I know is way too much time poring over the way too many questions that I ask on this survey. Thank you.  
- Bob Papper

### **Radio News Director Profile ... 2019 by Bob Papper**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found that radio news directors got a lot older in 2018.

#### **Radio: Age**

It must have been a tough year. Radio news directors aged from 46.4 a year ago to 48.4 this time around. And the median age moved from 47 last year to 50 this year.

Commercial station news directors are about 3 years older than those at public stations. Last year the spread was 8 years. Otherwise, there were no consistent relationships between age and market size or staff size, although news directors were a bit younger in the largest markets. Radio news director ages ranged from 20 to 83. A year ago the span was 17 years old up to 92.

Radio news directors have been on the job as news director for an average of 9 years, but with a median tenure of 5, it's clear that some long-time news directors are bringing up the average. Both numbers are up slightly from a year ago. One news director has been at the same station for 48 years; 40 and 38 are the closest to that. Non-commercial news directors have been at the station less time than their commercial counterparts, but no other grouping showed any consistent variability.

And their experience wasn't just at that station. The average radio news director has been a news director somewhere for 13 years; the median was 10. Both of those numbers are up. The average is up one (which seems to make sense a year later), but the median is up two. News directors at commercial stations have, on average 7 years more total experience than non-commercial news directors; the median difference is 9 years.

#### **Radio news directors ... and how news fits into their job**

Overall, two-thirds of radio news directors (67.9%) are full time station employees. That means a third (32.1%) are part time employees.

In a reversal of the last few years, more non-commercial news directors are full time employees than commercial ones (78.8% versus 63.8%). The bigger the staff, the more likely that the news director is full time, but market size made no difference. Neither did anything else.

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Part time also applies to news director responsibilities as well. More than a third (37.8%) of radio news directors say that news is not their primary responsibility. That's up more than 3 points from a year ago. Commercial stations were much higher than non-commercial ones, with 45.3% of news directors at commercial stations saying their primary station responsibility was not news versus 18% of non-commercial news directors. The spread is up 18 points between the two groups. Commercial news directors rose by 9 points and non-commercial ones fell by the same amount. The smaller the staff size and the smaller the market, the more likely that news was not the main responsibility.

So if news isn't the news director's primary job, then what is?

- 24% General manager/brand manager/operations manager
- 22.5 On-air announcer/DJ/host/anchor
- 17.8 Program director/music director
- 10.1 Owner/everything
- 6.2 Sales
- 6.2 No news director (on purpose, not unfilled)
- 4.7 Producing
- 2.3 Production
- 2.3 Sports
- 3.9 Other

For news directors whose primary responsibility was news, we continued to ask what other roles they had at the station. This list is all over the place.

- 31.5% On air, host, DJ
- 16.3 programming, program director
- 8.7 administration
- 8.7 general manager, station manager, brand manager
- 7.1 production
- 6.5 sports
- 5.4 fundraising, sales
- 5.4 owner, many, everything
- 3.3 digital/social media
- 2.7 engineer/chief engineer
- 1.6 producer
- 2.7 other

***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.***

### **About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2018 among all 1,685 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,481 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,310 television stations (77.7%) and 645 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,938 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.