

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

TV News Director Profile ... 2019 by Bob Papper

Another year and the RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey found that TV news directors got about another year older.

TV: Age

The typical TV news director aged from the upper-mid 40s into the upper 40s. The average age was 48.4, and the median was 48. That's almost exactly one year older than last year ... so it's hard to argue.

News directors at Fox stations continued to be the oldest of the group ... but only by a year or two. Age differences were small across all variables.

TV news director age by market size

Market size	Average age	Median age
1 - 25	48.7	47
26 - 50	50	49
51 - 100	47.8	47
101 - 150	47.6	48
150+	48.8	49.5

Overall, the age ranged from 29 to 72. That's markedly older on the young side and a little older on the older side.

The average TV news director has been news director at that station for 5.8 years -- although the median remained at just 3. The average rose a bit from last year. The longest serving news director at the same station has been there for an impressive 35 years. That news director wasn't alone in the 30+ club, but he or she had less company this year than in the past.

There is no consistent relationship between market size and time as news director. Markets 26 to 50 had the shortest average time (4.2 years), but markets 51 to 100 were the only ones with a median time below 3 (it was 2.5).

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News director turnover was greatest in the smallest newsrooms and least in other commercial, non-commercial stations and stations in the Midwest. But none of the differences was statistically significant.

The average TV news director has been a news director somewhere for a total of 10.5 years ... with a median of 7. Both of those numbers are almost identical to last year. The longest serving news director had been in that role, somewhere or other, for 45 years, and there were at least two of them

Averages varied inconsistently by market size, with market 151+ a year or so lower than all the others. Markets 26 to 150 all had medians of 8; market 1 to 25 had a median of 6, and markets 151+ had a median of 5.

News directors at CBS and then Fox had median news director experience of 11 to 12 years; ABC and Fox stations were just over 9.

Just over half – 52.5% -- of news directors are news directors at the only newsrooms they have ever led.

Male news directors have been in that role five years longer than women news directors. Both average and median. About what you'd expect.

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.