

Local News Numbers

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

A Shocking Development: A Small Increase in Local TV Newsrooms ... and a Record Amount of Local News by Bob Papper

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found that the number of TV stations originating local news actually went up by three in 2018 to 706. Over the last decade and more, consolidation had the number of local TV newsrooms dropping at an average of seven per year. Two years ago, the number went down by nine. But last year, the decline slowed to just two ... down to 703. And this year, it's up to 706. I don't see this as a trend, and we don't yet know what the Nexstar purchase of Tribune, the Gray/Raycom merger and purchase of United Communications and the Scripps purchase of Cordillera will mean. Stay tuned.

Those 706 TV stations run news on those and another 363 stations. That latter number is actually down by six from a year ago ... as a number of stations dropped out of the news business entirely. All had been marginal news players to begin with.

That puts the total number of stations running local news at 1,069, and that's down by three from last year's all-time high.

For those keeping score by affiliation, here's how those 706 newsrooms break down:

- 182 NBC affiliates ... up 2 after last year's increase by 3
- 169 CBS affiliates ... same
- 168 ABC affiliates ... same
- 77 Fox affiliates ... same
- 35 Univision affiliates ... down 1
- 26 Telemundo affiliates ... up 1 after being up 2 last year
- 17 Independents (four of which are Hispanic) ... same
- 14 PBS affiliates ... up 1
- 7 CW affiliates ... same
- 5 Youtoo America ... same
- 2 This TV affiliates ... same
- 2 MyNet ... same
- 1 EstrellaTV ... same
- 1 FamilyNet ... same

Local News Numbers

Most affiliates stayed the same, but, as usual, there is at least some movement:

Up from last year: NBC, Telemundo and PBS.

Down from last year: Univision

And here's how those 363 stations that get news from another station break down:

- 94 Fox affiliates ... up 1, reversing last year's 6 down
- 61 CW affiliates ... up 2 ... following last year's 6 station jump
- 44 MyNetworkTV affiliates ... down 1 after being up 4 last year
- 39 CBS affiliates ... up 1 ... for the second year in a row
- 33 ABC affiliates ... same
- 27 NBC affiliates ... down 2 after being up 2 a year ago
- 21 Independents ... down 2 following last year's 3 up
- 14 Telemundo affiliates ... up 3 following last year's increase of 1
- 9 UniMás ... down 7 from a year ago
- 9 Univision affiliates ... up 1 after a 1 station increase last year
- 3 MeTV affiliates ... same
- 1 PBS affiliates ... same
- 2 Retro TV affiliates ... same
- 1 Canal de las Estrellas ... same
- 1 ThisTV ... same
- 1 Accuweather ... same
- 1 FamilyNet ... same
- 1 America Teve ... down 1
- 1 Azteca America ... same

Not a lot of big changes in this list, but the number of UniMás stations carrying local news dropped significantly while Telemundo stations went up again. CW affiliates continue adding local news (unlike MyNet affiliates), and a significant majority of Fox affiliates continue to get their local news from another station.

Without getting into the whole list, I show no daily (at least weekday) local news on the following affiliates:

- 158 PBS affiliates ... same
- 61 ion stations ... up 1, again
- 42 MyNet affiliates ... down 1, following 5 down last year
- 30 CW affiliates ... up 1, after dropping 13 over the previous 3 years
- 15 UniMás affiliates ... up 9 from a year ago
- 8 Univision affiliates ... down 1, again
- 6 Telemundo affiliates ... down 1, again
- 5 Fox affiliates ... down 1, after dropping 1 the year before
- 4 CBS affiliates ... same
- 2 ABC affiliates ... same
- 2 NBC affiliates ... same

The amount of local news on TV hit a record high – on average – and tied the record based on the median. After sliding 12 minutes a year ago, the average amount of local news rose 18

2019 RTDNA/Hofstra University Newsroom Survey

Local News Numbers

minutes to 5.9 hours per weekday; the median remained at 6 hours per weekday. Weekend numbers stayed exactly the same.

Hours of local TV news per day – 2019

	Average weekday	Median weekday	Weekday maximum	Average Saturday	Median Saturday	Saturday maximum	Average Sunday	Median Sunday	Sunday maximum
All TV news	5.9	6	33	2.2	2	8	2.2	2	8
Big four affiliates	6.3	6	33	2.3	2	7	2.3	2	7
Other commercial	4	3	16	2	1	8	1.9	1	8
Market size:									
1-25	6.3	6	16	2.9	3	8	2.8	2	7.5
26-50	7.2	7	11.5	3.5	4	8	3.6	4	8
51-100	6.4	6	33	2.5	2.5	6.5	2.6	2.5	7
101-150	5.6	5	17	1.8	1.5	6	1.7	1	6
151+	4.6	4.3	22	1	1	3	0.9	1	2
Staff size:									
Staff 51+	8.6	8	33	3.9	4	8	3.9	4	8
Staff 31-50	6	6	10.5	2.3	2	5.5	2.1	2	5.5
Staff 21-30	5.1	5	17	1.3	1	4	1.2	1	4
Staff 11-20	4.1	4	22	0.9	1	4	0.8	1	3
Staff 1-10	1.2	1	2	0.1	0	1	0.1	0	1
Affiliation:									
ABC	5.7	6	10.5	2.2	2	6	2.2	2	5.5
CBS	6.4	6	22	2.2	2	5.5	2.1	2	6
Fox	8.2	9	14.5	2.9	3	6.5	3.2	3	6
NBC	6.1	5.8	33	2.3	2	7	2.2	2	7
PBS	0.9	1	1.5	0	0	0	0	0	0

All market sizes went up except the biggest ones. All staff sizes rose except the smallest ones. Overall, all network affiliates went up. Generally, the bigger the market and the bigger the news staff, the more news a TV station is likely to run. As always.

Amount of TV news changes ... the past year (2018)

	Increased	Decreased	Same	Not sure
All TV News	28.2%	1%	69.7%	1%
Big four affiliates	26.4	0.8	72	0.8
Other commercial	44	0	52	4
Market size:				
1-25	42.9	0	54.8	2.4
26-50	31.8	0	65.9	2.3
51-100	30	1.2	67.5	1.2
101-150	17.1	1.4	81.4	0
151+	25.9	1.7	72.4	0

Staying the same was the runaway winner -- with more than two-thirds of all stations. That's usually the case. The biggest markets and the biggest staffs were the most likely to increase

2019 RTDNA/Hofstra University Newsroom Survey

Local News Numbers

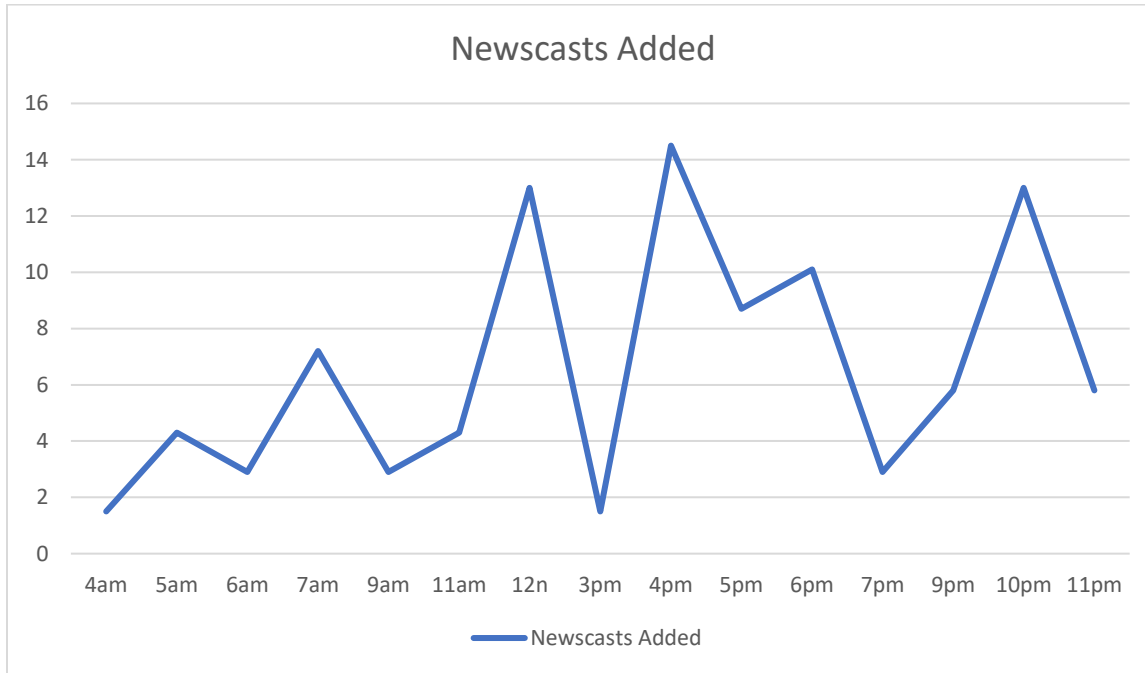
the amount of news. Network affiliation made no difference, but stations in the Northeast and then the South were more likely to add news than stations in the West or Midwest.

Changes in TV newscasts in the past year (2018)

	Added a newscast	Cut a newscast	Both added and cut	No change
All TV news	24.5%	1.8%	1.4%	72.3%
Big four affiliates	23.2	2	1.2	73.6
Other commercial	41.7	0	4.2	54.2
Market				
1 – 25	38.1	2.4	7.1	52.4
26 – 50	23.3	0	0	76.7
51 – 100	28	0	1.3	70.7
101 – 150	12.7	1.6	0	85.7
151+	23.6	5.5	0	70.9
Staff size				
51+	34.8	1.4	4.3	59.4
31 – 50	19.2	0	0	80.8
21 – 30	14.3	4.1	2	79.6
11 – 20	25.7	5.7	0	68.6
1 – 10	11.8	0	0	88.2

Clearly, most stations neither added nor cut back on newscasts in the past year. But beyond that, stations were about 20 times more likely to add newscasts as cut them. Other commercial stations were more likely to add newscasts than any other group, but network affiliation made no difference. Stations in the Northeast and South were more likely to add than stations in the West or Midwest.

Local News Numbers



The table above shows the relative (percentage) distribution of newscasts added. Weekend morning also got a fair number of votes; weekend evening less so.

There were so few newscasts cut – and all of them scattered across days and times – that it’s not worth cataloguing them.

Amount of TV news planned ... the next year - 2019

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV news	24.7%	0.3%	63.2%	11.7%
Big four affiliates	21.7	0.4	67.4	10.5
Other commercial	56	0	24	20
Market size:				
1-25	40.5	0	33.3	26.2
26-50	34.9	0	60.5	4.7
51-100	20.3	1.3	70.9	7.6
101-150	14.5	0	76.8	8.7
151+	24.1	0	60.3	15.5

Historically, this table has been a pretty good predictor of what the next year will look like. Markets 51 and smaller are all less likely to predict growth in news than they did a year ago, but markets 1 through 50 are markedly higher in expecting to be running more news. As usual, Fox affiliates are most likely to predict more news. So are other commercial stations and stations in the Northeast.

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.