

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

### **Serious Consolidation in Social Media in TV ... and Maybe a New Trend with Twitter by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found a lot fewer new things going on with social media in local TV news this year. And some are really re-thinking their whole approach to social media – in very different directions.

#### **What's the most important new thing you started doing with social media this past year?**

All told, 57.9% of news directors said they were doing something new this year. That's down a striking 15 points from a year ago – which was down 13 points from the year before. That might suggest a maturing of the approach to social media, but it could also suggest a re-evaluation period of what to do. My money's on the latter.

Markets 101 to 150 were lower than others; there was little difference by staff size. Fox affiliates were higher than others, but that's just catch-up since Fox affiliates were noticeably lower than others a year ago.

So what's new?

Two years ago, it was all about Facebook Live. Last year, it still came out on top, but well down. And it's even farther down this time around.

Strategic moves have been steadily moving up, and it comes out on top this year ... up from 33.3% to 38.2%. Those strategic efforts cover a full array of choices. Sometimes it was just developing a plan. More often, it involved setting specific posting goals for talent and/or most of the staff. Sometimes it was surveying or listening to the audience to mold the approach taken or digital only content. There was adding staff and oversight and pushing more to the station website or broadcast. More promotion and contests. But there were a sizeable number of news directors who said they cut back on social media and others who noted they cut back on Twitter. The "payoff [on social media] was too low," one said.

- Social first strategy - breaking news on social first, then linking back to more info on website
- Social listening. We are also laying the groundwork for more unique content on OTT
- The 2:00 newscast on Instagram/Snapchat that pushes to our website
- Created FB private group to help us understand our viewers better

## News Innovation

- De-emphasize social ... payoff too low
- Letting go of Twitter as a main focus, only a tool to bring content back to the newsroom quickly
- We've become much more tuned in to what users want to see/watch. We are much more video intensive
- Using social media not as promotion but as platform
- Making sure we are posting all breaking news there first
- We hired a Social Media Video Producer to produce snackable videos for social media, that are then cross-posted and/or used on broadcast newscasts
- More Facebook Lives or posting of video/photos to promote stories in newscasts
- Post web links and no FB Live. We now livestream

At 30.1% came streaming. Most often, this was Facebook Live, but more and more a news director simply said live streaming and specifically not Facebook Live. That streaming included live chats after shows or major events, long-form event coverage, newscasts, weather, news conferences, and breaking news.

- Facebook Live has been a huge engagement generator for us. We are using it multiple times daily
- Regular Facebook Live discussions, especially on breaking news/complex issues

Software came in at 18.7%. That's 50% higher than a year ago. Mostly that was more Instagram and Instagram stories. Snapchat and YouTube also got a few votes each.

Content came in at 13%. Mostly that was just more posting and more videos. Polling got a mention as well.

- Trying our best to offer even more content & viewer engagement via social media

### Facebook

The Survey didn't ask whether the TV station had a Facebook page. It's been five years since any station said it didn't have one. Every TV station (that runs local news) uses Facebook; the issue is how they use it and how much they get out of it.

## News Innovation

### Number of social media engagements in the most recent month

	Avg. No. (in thousands)	Median No. (in thousands)	Minimum	Maximum
Overall TV	1,524.7	347.2	0	39,000
Market size				
1 – 25	5,701.4	1,002	0	39,000
26 – 50	1844.1	785	106	9,300
51 – 100	1089.2	268.8	0.005	7,934.5
101 – 150	568.2	281.8	3.4	2,165
151+	439.1	226.8	6.5	1,360

This is just the second year for this question, and there are still comparatively few news directors who know the answer. The average number of engagements is up by around 300,000 compared to a year ago, but the median number is down by almost the same amount. I have no idea why that would be. Generally, the bigger the market and the bigger the news staff, the bigger the numbers are. For whatever reason, NBC affiliates and stations in the Northeast are way ahead of others in their area.

### The percent of station web traffic that came from social media:

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Overall TV	48.4%	45%	0	100%
Market size				
1 – 25	39.1	40	0	89
26 – 50	48.1	38	20	90
51 – 100	54	46	23	100
101 – 150	47.2	40	0	85
151+	51.7	50	14	85

Again, just the second year for this question, and this year's results are pretty close to those a year ago. Both average and median are within 5 points of last year, and both are on the down side of a year ago. There are no meaningful differences by staff size or affiliation, but stations in the Midwest lag all others.

### Twitter

#### Is the TV newsroom actively involved with Twitter? 2019

	Constantly	Daily	Periodically	No
All TV	47.5%	39.3	11.5%	1.6%
Market				
1 - 25	44.7	42.1	13.2	0
26 - 50	69.4	22.2	5.6	2.8
51 - 100	60.9	28.1	7.8	3.1
101 - 150	28.8	54.2	15.3	1.7
151+	38.3	46.8	14.9	0
Staff size				
51+	67.2	29.5	3.3	0

## News Innovation

31 - 50	47.8	40.6	10.1	1.4
21 - 30	39.5	46.5	11.6	2.3
11 - 20	23.3	46.7	26.7	3.3
1 - 10	26.7	33.3	33.3	6.7

For the third year in a row, Twitter use has declined in local TV newsrooms. It's not that more newsrooms aren't using Twitter at all; that number is little changed. But there's been a steady slide from constantly to daily to periodically. This year, another 3+ points got shaved off the constantly column ... and added to the periodically column. The drop comes mostly in top 50 markets and in markets 101 to 150. The two biggest newsroom groups both dropped. Non-commercial stations and CBS affiliates are the highest in Twitter usage, and other commercial and Fox affiliates are lowest. Usage is much higher in the Northeast and then the South than the Midwest or West.

### Other software programs in use

More than 200 news directors answered the question: What software were they using beyond Facebook and Twitter? A total of 81.9% said they were using some other software. That's down from last year's 95.5%.

Top 50 markets led the way, and use dropped steadily as staff size fell. CBS and Fox affiliates trailed ABC, NBC and other commercial. The Midwest lagged behind all other areas.

An astonishing 96.8% said they were using Instagram. Use varied from "just starting" and "just a little" to "daily" and "all the time."

What were they doing?

- For "behind the scenes" video
- Used more to show station community involvement
- Daily photo
- For lighter content, local events, fireworks, sunsets, pets
- Heavy headline and sports
- Mainly for promotion of talent when at community events
- Morning news and weather update
- Mostly community interaction
- Post viewer photos
- Stories for links to web, engagement with video on big stories
- Stories/polls
- High school football
- For feature stories mainly
- For talent to post funny and interesting pictures
- Story promotion and promotion of station events

Instagram so dominated the field that few news directors bothered to note what they were doing with other software.

Right after Instagram – in about 5<sup>th</sup> place, relatively speaking – came Snapchat at 17.3%. That's down more than 6 points from last year.

## News Innovation

- Filters to promote live broadcasts

At 8.6% came YouTube. That's up almost 2 from last year.

Down from a year ago, at 1.6%, came Pinterest.

After that, with no more than 1 or 2 total mentions came: Periscope, Social News Desk, Burst, Crowd Tangle, reddit, ChimelIn, LinkedIn, Nextdoor. Not a single news director noted how any of these were used.

The last few years has seen a clear trend of stations concentrating their social media efforts with fewer and fewer different software choices. Facebook (including Facebook Live), Twitter and Instagram are now pretty much universal.

After that, Snapchat and YouTube have comparatively small followings.

Pretty much all the rest have fallen off a cliff. At least for now.

***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.