

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

Local TV News Beyond the Local TV Channel by Bob Papper

Over the years, the RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey has shown a sharp growth in the outside reach of local TV newsrooms. That growth turned into stabilization a few years ago and has now moved into decline. The percentage of stations involved with other media has fallen from 76.6% two years ago to 68.3% last year and 60.5% this time around. The peak came in 2011 at 78.4%.

And that 60.5% is pretty much across the board. There are no meaningful differences by market size, staff size, network affiliation or geography.

After a series of increases, the percentage of stations that report being in a shared services or similar arrangement with another station dropped this year from 32.2% to 27.2%. Whether that reflects a structural change or simply the randomness of who filled out the survey and who didn't remains to be seen. For the first time, no market size hit 40%. As usual, markets 26 to 50 lag all others. Non big-four network affiliates are much more likely to be involved in such an arrangement. That's the only group surpassing 40% -- at 48.1%.

Of the stations involved in a Shared Services (or similar) arrangement, the average station supplied content to 1.9 other stations, up a bit from last year, but the median (most common) number continues to be one. The average drops when the question is, How many stations do you supply with local news? Then the average is 1.4, but the median remains at 1.

There are now 706 local TV newsrooms that run news on those and another 363 stations. The 706 total is up three from a year ago, and the latter number is down six. That puts the total number of stations running local news at 1,069.

TV news departments are providing content to a variety of other outlets

Percentage of TV news departments providing content to other media – 2019

	Local radio	TV in another market	Another local TV station	Website not your own	Cable TV channel	Other
All TV	36.9%	16.6%	12%	9.6%	4%	11%
Big four affiliates	36.8	15.8	11.7	9.8	4.1	11.7

2019 RTDNA/Hofstra University Newsroom Survey

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Other commercial	37	25.9	18.5	7.4	3.7	3.7
Market size:						
1-25	34	26	12	14	4	4
26-50	34.8	13	4.3	17.4	2.2	21.7
51-100	42.5	7.5	16.2	3.8	5	11.2
101-150	40.3	19.4	16.4	6	4.5	7.5
151+	29.3	20.7	6.9	12.1	3.4	12.1

For the second year in a row, virtually every category is down this year versus last year. The only two that went up were website not you own and other. Everything else fell, and it did so pretty much across every subgroup in the Survey.

“Other” was surprisingly high this year, but that’s a bit deceptive. Most of the “other” answers involved other stations in the ownership group or other network affiliates. I always viewed that as self-evident so I didn’t offer it as an option. Most of the remaining said local newspapers; a couple said Alexa or a digital subchannel, and one noted gas pump news.

Stations remain involved in cooperative ventures with others ... but not most stations

The table above deals with TV stations supplying news to other media. The next table deals with cooperative ventures among media outlets. I started asking about cooperative ventures in 2008 as stations responded to recessionary pressures by sharing costs to save money. Most stations participated. The question has always been, Would that continue when the economy improved? The answer is yes ... but less and less so. This is the fifth year in a row where a minority of stations have been involved in a cooperative venture, and the percentage has plunged from last year’s 47% to this year’s 36.5%.

Aside from the local or nearby TV station for which you produce news, do you have a cooperative news gathering or coverage agreement with the following?

	Local newspaper	Another TV station	Local radio station	Other	No
All TV	17.6%	15.5%	11.5%	3.4%	63.5%
Big four affiliates	16.9	11.9	10.3	3.4	67
Other commercial	14.8	48.1	18.5	0	37
Market					
1 - 25	18	40	18	2	42
26 - 50	23.9	21.7	6.5	0	65.2
51 - 100	21.8	6.4	11.5	1.3	70.5
101 - 150	15.2	9.1	12.1	6.1	63.6
151+	8.9	8.9	8.9	7.1	71.4

Markets 1 to 25 dropped the least, but virtually every subgroup dropped from a year ago. Only other commercial stations went up.

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“Other” was an unusually small list this time around; only a website got more than a single mention.

What are you sharing?

	Information	Pool video	Helicopter	Other
All TV	82.7%	37.8%	16.3%	20.4%
Market				
1 - 25	69.2	50	42.3	19.2
26 - 50	71.4	50	21.4	14.3
51 - 100	90	30	5	10
101 - 150	100	27.3	4.5	27.3
151+	81.2	31.2	0	31.2

Everything but other went down this year although nothing changed by much. The “other” category went up 5 points, but virtually everything on that list was content/news stories or video. Both could have fallen under information and pool video.

The percentage of stations *not* involved in a cooperative venture but planning or discussing one remained low at 10.4%. That’s up 1 point from a year ago. Those most likely to be planning some cooperative venture were Fox affiliates and those in the smallest newsrooms.

Note that for both of the above tables, the percentages will add to more than 100% because some stations are involved in more than one cooperative venture, and they share more than one thing.

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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.