

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 Website Profitability Edges Up by Bob Papper

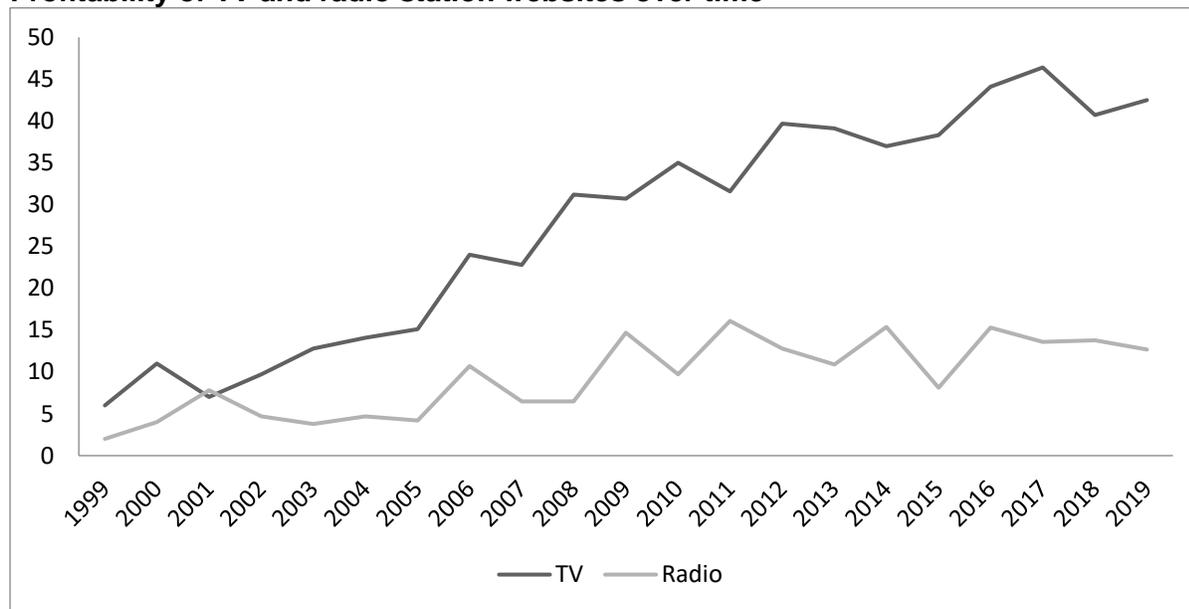
This past year saw a modest increase in TV website profitability – up nearly 2 points after last year’s 6-point drop. The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found that the biggest change came in a big profitability jump in markets 26 to 50. Otherwise, changes were relatively small. Note that over 40% of news directors don’t know the answer to the question.

Is the TV website making money? 2019

	Profit	Breaking Even	Loss	Don't Know
All TV	42.5%	10.3%	4%	43.3%
Market size:				
1 -25	41.7	11.1	8.3	38.9
26 - 50	54.3	11.4	0	34.3
51 - 100	50.7	14.5	2.9	31.9
101 - 150	31.7	5	5	58.3
151+	36.5	9.6	3.8	50

Two market groups now pass the 50% mark in profitability. Websites at the smallest two groups of newsrooms (1 to 10 staffers and 11 to 20) hold the percentage down. As usual, Fox affiliates lag behind all others – by a lot – although none showed a loss. Stations in the Midwest and West lag behind those in the Northeast and South.

Profitability of TV and radio station websites over time



The general upward trajectory in TV is pretty clear; so is radio's up and down ride.

Paywalls

The number of TV stations reporting paywalls (a monetary charge to access a station website) fell from last year's 2 to this year's 0. That's not percentage; it's actual number of stations. Not a single local TV station in this year's survey reported having a paywall. However, 3.5% of the stations reported that they're considering a paywall in the future. That's about the same as a year ago ... which obviously didn't materialize. None of the stations considering a paywall is in a top 50 markets.

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.