

## Tech Trends and Digital Innovation

The [first installment](#) of the 2020 newsroom survey found that local TV news directors see threats to their newsrooms from fracturing audiences, staffing issues, corporate cuts and a weak economy, among other challenges, all now compounded by COVID.

In this installment, we'll look at the technology trends and digital strategies news directors are trying to address those challenges.

What asked about the most innovative thing they've done in the past year, more than 200 TV news directors responded, with more than half mentioning digital initiatives.

About half of radio news managers said they've done something new in the last year, and among nearly 200 responses, online and multi-media content were common topics.

Among the most mentioned digital initiatives by TV managers include developing [digital first](#) or digital only content strategies. News directors report their newsrooms are developing digital only content, creating more multi-media and multi-channel content, and executing longer form storytelling on digital platforms. While Facebook Live is a less frequently mentioned streaming platform than in past years, streaming via owned channels is an increasingly common digital strategy. Beyond traditional newscasts, more stations are producing different content formats for their digital platforms, including:

- Town hall community discussions
- Long-form interviews and specials
- Special series or projects
- Streaming (including OTT and on station-owned platforms)
- History or archives
- Podcasts
- Newsletters

Radio managers were particularly likely to mention investing time in creating daily or weekly podcasts, in addition to adding audio and video content to their websites. Just 83.7% of radio managers say they post local news online, but among those who do, web only content, graphics and multimedia.

Fewer radio news managers than ever – less than 15% – said they were planning technology purchases, illustrating the implications of radio's increasing revenue and budget challenges.

### Social Media

A developing trend shows fewer news directors – still a majority among TV newsrooms, but down to about 35% of radio newsrooms – report doing new things on social media. Over just the last few years, the number of social media platforms stations report using at least casually has narrowed dramatically. Newsrooms appear to be less quick to jump on trending new platforms and more strategic in their use of the big three: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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Facebook Live appears to be losing its luster for many, though not all, TV stations. More TV and radio newsrooms report using Twitter daily or periodically rather than continually. Instagram has reached near 100% adoption among TV newsrooms for content including lives, stories and extra behind-the-scenes style content.

Newsrooms report focusing more on social media content quality, targeting and goal setting to drive audiences from social to their owned digital channels.

Still, relatively few news directors know their social media engagement numbers or how much web traffic their social platforms drive.

**Drones well established in TV newsrooms.** This year saw a slower increase in drone ownership after a big jump last year, as more stations either already own drones or are planning drone purchases. 75% of the newsrooms with the most staff (51+) own drones versus just 20% of newsrooms with the smallest news teams. Stations in the Midwest are most likely to own drones, while stations in the Northeast are most likely to be planning purchases. At least one station reported using drones more regularly for day-turn stories in addition to breaking news.

#### Mobile

Just over 95% of TV stations now have apps – two, on average – a percentage that continues to grow. App strategies appear to be well developed, with fewer news managers reporting big strategic changes in the mobile space. Those that do report app improvements most often mention push alert strategy: Getting more strategic and using geo- or topic-targeting for app alerts. Newsrooms are also focusing on app-specific content and on-app streaming. Notably, less than one percent of stations charge for an app.

Among radio newsrooms, 61.9% have apps, down slightly from last year. Newsrooms mentioning making changes in mobile over the last year cite designing mobile friendly websites, streaming, smart speaker strategies and new or redesigned apps.

Like with OTT, some news directors report it is [too soon to tell](#) what impact these initiatives will have, but many report digital metrics increasing “dramatically,” “phenomenally” or “exponentially.”

To execute their digital initiatives, TV news directors report reallocating staff, either building independent, digital-only content teams, or shifting the whole newsroom to a multi-platform mindset. Radio news directors were more likely to report focusing on training, reviews and feedback to staff.

### **About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey, funded in part by the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication at Hofstra University, was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2019 among all 1,702 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,427 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,313 television stations (77.1%) and 673 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,996 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.

### **About Bob Papper**

Bob Papper is Adjunct Professor of Broadcast and Digital Journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news.