

Please note the new partnership on this research as it becomes the RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey. I am privileged to have joined the outstanding faculty at Syracuse. That's the name you'll see on the research from here on ... and that's what you'll see on the painfully long survey questionnaire later this fall.

Bob Papper

TV News Director Profile ... 2020 **by Bob Papper**

Another year gone by, but the RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that TV news directors didn't age a bit (they only feel older).

TV: Age

The typical TV news director remained exactly the same (in age) from last year to this year. The average age was 48.5, and the median was 48. That puts the average age up 0.1 and the median unchanged from a year ago.

News directors at the largest stations were a bit older than others, but the difference was minor. Market size made no consistent difference. News directors in the Northeast were a little older, and news directors at CBS stations became the oldest by network affiliation as Fox affiliated news directors, who had held that title for the last couple years, moved into a tie with NBC for the youngest.

TV news director age by market size - 2020

Market size	Average age	Median age
1 - 25	50	49
26 - 50	50.2	49
51 - 100	48.7	48
101 - 150	46.9	48
150+	48.4	48

Overall, the age ranged from 25 to 76. That's both younger on the young side and older on the older side compared to a year ago.

The average TV news director has been news director at that station for 5.3 years -- although the median remained at just 3. The average fell a half year from a year ago, but the median hasn't changed as long as I've asked the question. The longest-serving news director at the same station has been there for an impressive 36 years. And that news director wasn't alone in the 30+ club.

There's no consistent relationship between market size and time as news director. Markets 51 to 100 had the shortest average time, at 4.2 years and the shortest median at 2. Markets 101 to 150 had the longest average time, at 6.3, but the median was 3 – the same as markets 26 to 50 and 151+. Top 25 markets had a median of 2.5.

Fox affiliates had the shortest average and median tenure as did stations in the West. News directors in the Northeast and at non big four network affiliates had been at their stations the longest. Staff size made no consistent difference.

The average TV news director has been a news director somewhere for a total of 10.7 years ... with a median of 7. Both of those numbers are almost identical to the last couple years. The longest-serving news director has been in that role, somewhere or other, for a staggering 46 years, and there were at least two who passed the 40 mark.

Averages varied inconsistently by market size, with market 151+ a couple years or so lower than all the others.

News directors at CBS and then ABC had average and median experience longer than those at Fox or NBC stations.

Just over half – 50.6% -- of news directors are news directors at the only newsrooms they have ever led. That number is just a hair lower than last year.

Male news directors are about five years older than female news directors. Both average and median.

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.