

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

## **Radio News Director Profile ... 2020 by Bob Papper**

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that radio news directors continued to age through 2019.

### **Radio: Age**

The good news is that another year later just made radio news directors another year older. A year ago, they got a lot older. Radio news directors aged from 48.4 to 49.7 this time around. The median age moved from 50 last year to 51 this year. Seems fair enough.

Commercial station news directors continued to be about 3 years older than those at public stations. Two years ago, the spread was 8 years. Otherwise, there were no consistent relationships between age and market size or staff size, although news directors continued to be a bit younger in the largest markets. Radio news director ages ranged from 19 to 93. Amazingly, that's not the biggest age range we've ever had. Just two years ago, the ages went from 17 to 92. Seventeen?

Radio news directors have been on the job as news director for an average of 10.4 years, but with a median tenure of 6, it's clear that some long-time news directors are bringing up the average. Both numbers are up slightly from a year ago. Again. One news director has been at the same station for 50 years; two others are at 49, and others are over 40. Those are astonishing numbers. Non-commercial news directors have been at their stations about two years less than their commercial counterparts, but no other grouping showed any consistent variability.

And their experience wasn't just at that station. The average radio news director has been a news director somewhere for 14.1 years; the median was 10. The average is up (again), but the median stayed the same. News directors at commercial stations averaged about 6 years more experience than non-commercial news directors; the median difference was eight. There weren't a lot of differences based on other criteria, although major market news directors had noticeably less overall experience than news directors in all other market sizes.

**Is there a radio news director at all? And is he or she full time?**

Almost a quarter (23.4%) of all the radio stations *that run local news* don't have a news director. That breaks down to 25.2% of commercial stations and 18.2% of non-commercial stations. Percentages fell as staff size went up, but market size didn't make that much difference.

More than a quarter (26.6%) of radio news directors are not full-time station employees: 29.3% at commercial stations and 19.8% at non-commercial ones. That's down about 6 points from last year. Interestingly, staff size didn't make that much difference, but market size did. Generally, the smaller the market, the more likely that the news director wasn't a full-time employee – up to 35.3% in the smallest markets.

### **Radio news directors ... and how news fits into their job**

Part time also applies to news director responsibilities as well. Almost a third (31.5%) of radio news directors say that news is not their primary responsibility. That's down 6 points from last year. Commercial stations were much higher than non-commercial ones, with 38% of news directors at commercial stations saying their primary station responsibility was not news versus 15.4% of non-commercial news directors.

So, if news isn't the news director's primary job, then what is?

- 24.3% Program director/music director ... up 7 points
- 21.4 General manager/brand manager/operations manager ... down slightly
- 21.4 On-air announcer/DJ/host/anchor ... down 1
- 5.7 Owner ... half of a year ago
- 4.3 Sales ... down 2 points
- 4.3 Sports ... double last year
- 10 Everything ... about the same
- 8.6 Other ... up a bit

For news directors whose primary responsibility was news, we continued to ask what other roles they had at the station. The list is all over the place.

- 27.8% Administration ... down a bit
- 26.1 On air, host, DJ ... down a bit
- 12.3 Sports ... double a year ago
- 10.9 Digital/social media ... triple a year ago
- 7.7 Production ... up slightly
- 4.9 Fundraising, sales ... down slightly
- 3.9 Owner, many, everything ... down a bit
- 2.7 Engineer/chief engineer
- 2.1 Producer .... up a bit
- 2.7 Other

### **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.