

Radio Staffing Largely Stable ... As Usual by Bob Papper

The latest RTDNA/Lawrence Herbert School of Communication - Hofstra University Survey shows the typical (median) radio news operation had a full-time news staff of one -- the same as it's been since I started doing these surveys 26 years ago.

All told, 80.6% of all multi-station local groups operate with a centralized newsroom. That's virtually identical to a year ago.

Radio staff size – 2020

	Average full-time	Median full-time	Max full-time	Average part-time	Median part-time	Max part-time	Average total staff	Median total staff	Max total staff
All Radio	3	1	76	1.7	1	34	4.8	3	79
Market size:									
Major	8.9	4	76	3.3	2	34	12.7	8	79
Large	3.3	2	22	1.6	1	13	5	4	35
Medium	1.8	1	12	1.4	1	13	3.2	2	13
Small	1.1	1	7	1.3	1	10	2.4	2	11
Commercial	1.7	1	38	1.4	1	18	3.2	2	56
Non-comm	5.6	2	76	2.4	1	34	8.1	5	79

Usually, we go from year to year in radio news staffing with little to no change. Until last year. The median – or typical -- number of radio news people at a station remained at 1. That's the same number it's been for the quarter century plus that I've been doing this survey. But the average number of radio news people (per station) in last year's survey soared from 2 to 3.1. That's a huge jump. And while we see that jump at its most pronounced at major market stations, every market category went up. This year, two of the four market sizes went down slightly; one stayed the same; and one rose modestly. But the average full-time staff held at 3.

How did that happen?

First, the number of really large radio newsrooms participating in the Survey has continued to remain high. You can see that in the size of the maximum number of staff reported. Three of the four market sizes went up, with the biggest, major market radio newsroom jumping from 30 people two years ago to 50 last year to 79 this time around. The biggest large market radio newsroom went up to 35.

I break down radio numbers in a variety of ways, but the sharpest overall contrast in radio news is between commercial and non-commercial stations. And the differences have become sharper and deeper year after year.

Interestingly, the number of stations in a local cluster makes no difference in how many news people the stations have. Whether there are one, two, three, four, five or six or more local stations running local news, the median number of news people remains at one. Even the average number of news people doesn't move with the number of stations. Nor does geography make any difference.

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the news staff is likely to be.

Changes in radio staff in the last 12 months (2019) and planned for the future – 2020

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
Total news staff the past year (2019)	14.5%	10.6%	74.2%	0.7%
Plan to change amount of staff next year (2020)	11.9	1.7	75.2	11.2

The percentage of stations increasing staff fell by 4 points in the past year; the percentage decreasing staff rose by 2. The bigger the staff and the bigger the market size, the more likely that the station added staff. Number of stations and geography made no difference. Non-commercial stations were almost three times more likely to add staff than commercial ones. In fact, commercial stations increased and decreased staff at just about the exact same level ... with 80% staying the same.

Predictions for this year are almost exactly the same as they were a year ago. The bigger the staff and the bigger the market, the more likely for the station to expect to increase staff. Non-commercial stations are more than four times as likely to expect to increase staff as commercial stations.

Major markets are those with 1 million or more potential listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

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.