

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 Efforts with OTT are All Over the Map **by Bob Papper**

Another first-time question in this year's RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey: What, if anything, are you doing with OTT?

OTT stands for over the top, and while there's some disagreement over exactly what qualifies as over the top, it generally refers to program material that consumers receive via streaming rather than via cable, satellite or telco. Most commonly, that content has arrived at consumers via Hulu or Roku or YouTube, but more and more companies are setting up their own services:

- Tegna's (and Gray's) Premion
- Sinclair's STIRR and CompulseOTT
- CBSN (city)
- Local X (NBC)
- Disney+

Just over half of TV news directors, 53.8%, said they're doing something with OTT. Without exception, the larger the newsroom staff, the more likely that the station was doing something with OTT, from 62% in the largest newsrooms down to 16.7% in the smallest. Market size didn't matter, although top 25 markets were slightly higher than others. NBC affiliates were a little higher than others, and Fox affiliates were a little lower. Other commercial stations were much lower and non-commercial stations came in at zero.

Attempting to characterize what stations are doing with OTT is no easy trick. News director descriptions are all over the map. And answers like Hulu and Roku don't shed a lot of light on what, exactly, the station is running on Hulu and Roku.

Streaming all or at least some of the station newscasts is probably at the top of the list. Right behind that came digital-only content, although that content was seldom described. The closest we came was long- or at least longer-form content. On-demand stories, special reports and live, breaking news all got a fair number of mentions. Quite a few stations noted streaming on a number (up to seven) channels of local content.

A bunch of stations were really either just starting or just about to start with OTT, so there wasn't much detail available.

Some just noted the streaming services: Hulu, Roku, YouTube, SBTV (which is part of Syncback, which was also noted a few times), AppleTV, NewsON, Amazon Firestick and Alexa, Playstation, Haystick ... in roughly that order ... in addition to the earlier list above.

In their own words:

- 7 live streams, digital only shows, on demand stories
- Adding long form content
- Company created a channel we populate with local content
- Digital channels on all streaming devices
- Launched a 24/7 feed
- Multiple daily unique news and weather updates, custom sports content, long-form content.
- We do have a pay YouTube channel with thousands of people paying to watch our content
- Nothing in news, more in programming
- On Hulu, YouTube TV with full linear streams; On SBTV with live and repeat newscasts + half-hour specials (locally produced content)
- Our OTT platform is loaded with content - including all our live content
- Posting longform videos, especially about historical topics, on YouTube.
- Sales is in that space, news not yet -- maybe promotion opportunity
- We are streaming our newscasts and have video on demand playlists. We have dedicated playlists during breaking news and special event coverage.
- We have an OTT app that aggregates topical coverage and also has OTT-exclusive content
- We have begun producing OTT specific content like mini-docs or longer form news stories.
- We have several content series on OTT - Adulting 101, Weather U, Taste Tests
- We have two streams that we program 24/7

And I asked what OTT was allowing the station to do ... motivation, if you will:

- 53.4% Reach new audiences
- 29.2 Make extra revenue
- 27.3 Go deeper with content
- 14.3 Tell stories you wouldn't otherwise tell
- 9.3 Get more feedback from the audience

But, really, the overall winner was, "too early to tell" at 57.1%.

The table below, by market size, sheds some light on station motivation in OTT.

Is OTT allowing you to ...

	Reach new audiences	Go deeper with content	Tell stories you wouldn't otherwise tell	Get more feedback from the audience	Make extra revenue	Too early to tell
All TV Market	53.4%	27.3%	14.3%	9.3%	29.2%	57.1%
1 – 25	61.9	38.1	19	14.3	33.3	42.9
26 – 50	72.7	36.4	13.6	0	40.9	31.8
51 – 100	56.1	39	22	9.8	26.8	58.5
101 – 150	40	15.6	6.7	8.9	20	68.9
151+	50	15.6	12.5	12.5	34.4	65.6

Note that the rows won't add up to 100% because news directors could choose as many answers as were applicable.

Clearly, we're early in what could well be a revolution in local TV.

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

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