

After 12+ years, this is the final RTDNA Survey project in conjunction with the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication at Hofstra University. It's not the end of the research ... or even this year's publications, but the sponsoring university is changing. My thanks to Hofstra for its support these dozen years.

Bob Papper

The Complex Picture of Social Media in TV News -- 2020 by Bob Papper

All told, 56.2% of news directors said they were doing something new in the latest RTDNA/Lawrence Herbert School of Communication - Hofstra University Survey. That's down almost two points from a year ago – which was down 15 points from the year before that, which followed a 13-point drop. Starting to look like a real trend.

What's the most important new thing you started doing with social media this past year?

Interestingly, the percentages were little different based on market size, staff size, network affiliation or geography.

So what's new?

Three years ago, it was all about Facebook Live. Two years ago, it was mostly about Facebook Live. Less so last year, and definitely not this time around.

Strategic moves are on top of the list for the second year in a row. At 34.9%, it just edged out the other members of the triumvirate dominating social media initiatives.

But there's nothing uniform about those strategic moves. It includes more targeted or focused posting, more quotas for posting, cutting back Facebook Live and more focus on moving people to the station website, more staff, more direction.

In their own words:

- Inviting people who've liked our articles to like/follow our page, doubling number of fans within a year
- Concentration on specific items for Instagram to generate engagement
- Custom graphics and shareable graphics
- Doing LESS of it, making it more of a promotional platform and link to OUR website
- Driving engagement and creating a competition out of it for the team

- Eliminated "recruit to view" posts
- Focus less on interactions and more on Facebook referrals
- Focus on audience flow back to owned digital channels (website, app)
- Focus on shareable quality over post quantity.
- Micro-target
- Posting more stories with links back to our website
- Publishing top performers on a regular basis with explanations of best practices.
- Set Goals for all staffers to be listed in the top 20 in social rank. This has led to more social activity.
- Snackable videos to promote news content
- Taking our live streams OFF Facebook and pushing views to our website - impact on social has been negligible
- Telling my on-air talent to be more real with the audience. show them the ups and downs of the job, but NO POLITICS online
- The talent have dramatically increased their social media interaction
- We created a full time Social Media coordinator to make sure we are providing appropriate content to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- We pulled back on ineffective promotion (pushes to the on-air product), focusing on news stories and coverage, pushing people to our website/app.

Just behind strategy, at 33%, came "more." More posting, more Facebook Live, more video on social media, more streaming, more push notifications.

In their own words:

- Creating more video strictly for social media
- Many more Facebook Lives. Very actively posting original material on Facebook and using it much more to cross-platform market the website.
- More video-only projects for social media platforms
- We are asking reporters and anchors to post at least twice a day to social media

Just behind that came software. Almost entirely Instagram, without much explanation given on why or with what goals. I'm not saying those don't exist – only that they weren't articulated in the survey.

In their own words:

- Capsule stories for IG and Facebook stories

- We do what we call a takeover, where a staffer "takes over" the Instagram page for the day.
- Instagram locally produced stories
- Increased Facebook Lives

There were a few content notes related to promoting newscasts ... and one contrarian.

- We do not emphasize social media much at all.

Facebook

The Survey didn't ask whether the TV station had a Facebook page. It's been five years since any station said it didn't have one. Every TV station (that runs local news) uses Facebook; the issue is how they use it and how much they get out of it.

Number of social media engagements in the most recent month

	Avg. No. (in thousands)	Median No. (in thousands)	Minimum	Maximum (in thousands)
Overall TV	782	427	0	3,939
Market size				
1 – 25	672	638	0	1,500
26 – 50	847	375	15	3,352
51 – 100	768	350	0	3,246
101 – 150	957	726	0	3,939
151+	635	338	0	3,000

This is just the third year for this question, and there are still comparatively few news directors who know the answer. The average number is about half of last year's, but the median number is up. Normally, there's a pattern by market size, but that's not the case this year. There's more of a pattern by staff size, with stations with larger staffs having higher average and median numbers, but even that's inconsistent. We'll have to wait for more news directors to know the answers before this table provides a better guide on social media engagement.

The percent of station web traffic that came from social media:

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Overall TV	48.9%	51.5%	0	90%
Market size				
1 – 25	49.4	50	0	90
26 – 50	50.5	46	25	85
51 – 100	48.1	53	0	85
101 – 150	52.7	56	13	75
151+	44.9	50	12	85

Again, just the third year for this question, and even fewer news directors knew the answer than on engagement. Still, this year's results are pretty close to those a year ago and the year before that. Average is almost exactly the same; median moved up from 45 to 51.5. Other than

the smallest staff size having much lower numbers, there are no meaningful differences by staff size, affiliation or geography.

Twitter

Is the TV newsroom actively involved with Twitter? 2020

	Constantly	Daily	Periodically	No
All TV	44.2%	42.9%	10.8%	2.2%
Market				
1 - 25	42.3	38.5	7.7	11.5
26 - 50	72.2	22.2	5.6	0
51 - 100	54.8	33.9	8.1	3.2
101 - 150	29.5	60.7	9.8	0
151+	28.3	50	21.7	0
Staff size				
51+	66	30.2	1.9	1.9
31 - 50	46.3	44.8	6	3
21 - 30	35.3	56.9	7.8	0
11 - 20	22.7	45.5	27.3	4.5
1 - 10	15.8	36.8	42.1	5.3

For the fourth year in a row, Twitter use has declined in local TV newsrooms. It's not that more newsrooms aren't using Twitter at all; that number is little changed. But there's been a steady slide from constantly to daily to periodically. This year, another 3+ points got shaved off the constantly column ... and added to the daily column. The drop comes mostly in top 25 markets and in markets 151+. The constantly column declined in all staff sizes. Non-commercial and other commercial stations are most likely not to use Twitter at all. Usage remains much higher in the Northeast than all other regions.

Other software programs in use

More than 200 news directors answered the question: What software were they using beyond Facebook and Twitter? A total of 84.2% said they were using some other software. That's up 2+ points from last year.

Staff size made the biggest and most consistent difference. The bigger the staff, the more likely the station used social media beyond Facebook and Twitter

An astonishing 99.5% said they were using Instagram.

What were they doing? In their own words:

- Post some breaking news pictures and station events.
- Instagram - 4-5 posts daily of compelling images/video
- Instagram - behind the scenes, generally lighter & visual news updates.
- Instagram - mostly for our Mobile Alert Center appearances, school visits

- Instagram - mostly UGC and weather pics
- Instagram - photo of the day, behind the scenes...
- Instagram - still figuring it out
- Instagram - We do daily lives on Instagram and post top stories
- Instagram - we have an Instagram-only show we produce once per week
- Instagram- short form stories, promotion for newscasts. photojournalism
- Instagram— daily presence for lists and stories to share news gathering, behind the scenes and station initiatives, as well as beauty shots from around our viewing area
- Instagram, posting our mini-documentary stories, which are incredibly artfully visual.
- Instagram. Promotions producer follows crews on non-death stories, posts behind the scenes pushes.

After Instagram – and that would be at one-eighth the level – came Snapchat, used by 10% of those using social media beyond Facebook and Twitter.

In their own words:

- Snapchat - Behind the scenes content.
- Snapchat to get story ideas
- Snapchat - promoting our live sporting events coverage
- Snapchat for location filters

At 2.7%, came YouTube.

In their own words:

- YouTube - directors cuts
- YouTube for video sharing.

At half of YouTube's level came TikTok – but people were just starting.

Then Pinterest, Reddit, Nextdoor and LinkedIn with one or two mentions each.

- Nextdoor to share warnings and alerts

It was just a few years ago that there were two dozen social media software choices that stations were using. Over a short period of time, that wide range of options has narrowed dramatically ... at the same time the focus and purpose of social media has been steadily shifting from an end in itself to a means to an end: moving people to the station website.

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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