

Local TV News Beyond the Local Channel ... 2020
by Bob Papper

Over the years, the RTDNA/Lawrence Herbert School of Communication - Hofstra University Survey had shown a sharp growth in the outside reach of local TV newsrooms as more and more stations ran their news on other TV stations, radio stations, cable channels and more. That growth turned into stabilization a few years ago, then into decline, and now has stabilized again. The percentage of stations involved with other media has fallen from 76.6% three years ago to 68.3% two years ago to 60.5% last year and again this time around. The peak came in 2011 at 78.4%.

And the current 60.5% is pretty much across the board. There are no large differences by market size, staff size, network affiliation or geography.

After a series of increases, the percentage of stations that report being in a shared services or similar arrangement with another station dropped from 32.2% two years ago to 27.2% last year and 27% this year. For the first time, no market size hit 35%, but markets 26 to 100 lag all others. Non big-four network affiliates are modestly more likely to be involved in such an arrangement, but that's down from last year's 48.1% to this year's 34.6%.

Of the stations involved in a Shared Services (or similar) arrangement, the average station supplied content to 1.7 other stations, down a bit from last year, but the median (most common) number continues to be one. The average drops when the question is, "How many stations do you supply with local news?" Then the average is 1.3, but the median remains at 1.

There are now 705 local TV newsrooms that run news on those and another 393 stations. The 705 total is down one from a year ago, but the latter number is up 30. That puts the total number of stations running local news at a record 1,098.

TV news departments provide content to a variety of other outlets

Percentage of TV news departments providing content to other media – 2020

	Local radio	TV in another market	Another local TV station	Website not your own	Cable TV channel	Other
All TV	35.9%	17.1%	14.9%	7.8%	2.8%	9.3%
Big four affiliates	36.8	17.2	13.2	8.4	3.2	9.6
Other commercial	33.3	20.8	37.5	4.2	0	4.2
Market size:						
1-25	28.9	10.5	23.7	15.8	5.3	2.6
26-50	31.8	13.6	11.4	4.5	0	6.8
51-100	37.2	16.7	14.1	3.8	1.3	10.3
101-150	44.3	17.1	17.1	7.1	4.3	11.4

151+	31.4	25.5	9.8	11.8	3.9	11.8
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Four of the six categories were down this year compared to last year. Only TV in another market and another local TV station went up – and both were only up slightly. Most results are pretty close to a year ago.

Almost two-thirds of the “other” answers involved other stations in the ownership group or other network affiliates. I always viewed that as self-evident, so I didn’t offer it as an option. Most of the remaining “other” said local newspapers or radio stations.

Stations remain involved in cooperative ventures with others ... but not most stations

The table above deals with TV stations supplying news to other media. The next table deals with cooperative ventures among media outlets. I started asking about cooperative ventures in 2008 as stations responded to recessionary pressures by sharing costs to save money. Most stations participated. The question has always been, would that continue when the economy improved? The answer is yes ... but less so. This is the sixth year in a row where a minority of stations have been involved in a cooperative venture, although the percentage involved in a cooperative venture actually rose modestly from 36.5% last year to 39.1% this time around.

Aside from the local or nearby TV station for which you produce news, do you have a cooperative news gathering or coverage agreement with the following?

	Local newspaper	Another TV station	Local radio station	Other	No
All TV	18.5%	17.7%	12.2%	3%	60.9%
Big four affiliates	18.8	14.6	12.5	3.3	62.5
Other commercial	16.7	45.8	12.5	0	45.8
Market					
1 - 25	25.6	43.6	15.4	0	41
26 - 50	18.6	20.9	11.6	4.7	62.8
51 - 100	20.5	11	12.3	1.4	64.4
101 - 150	16.7	12.1	16.7	4.5	56.1
151+	12	12	4	4	76

Most subgroups went up modestly, but since the percentage of stations involved in cooperative ventures only went up by three points, it suggests that the third or so of stations already involved in cooperative ventures simply got involved with more media.

“Other” was an unusually small list this time around; only other websites got more than a single mention.

What are you sharing?

	Information	Pool video	Helicopter	Other
All TV	86%	49.5%	14%	12.9%
Market				
1 - 25	65	65	50	5
26 - 50	71.4	42.9	21.4	14.3

51 - 100	100	36.4	0	4.5
101 - 150	96.2	53.8	0	11.5
151+	90.9	45.5	0	45.5

A mixed picture this year, with information and, especially, video going up and helicopter and, especially “other” going down. Information rose less than four points, but video soared by almost a dozen. Helicopter edged down by two – all below market 50.

“Other” was all over the place, from digital content to “media assets” to staff and “varies.”

Only 8.4% of stations not involved in a cooperative venture said they’re considering one. 91.6% said no. There were no consistent patterns, but Fox affiliates and non-commercial stations were higher than all the others in considering a cooperative venture.

Note that for all of the above tables, the percentages will add to more than 100% because some stations are involved in more than one cooperative venture, and they share more than one thing.

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.