

Local TV News Employment Slips ... but Still Near All-Time High by Bob Papper

The latest RTDNA/Lawrence Herbert School of Communication - Hofstra University Survey shows total local TV news employment fell by 1.1% from last year. That's a loss of 300 jobs. Contrast that with the 700 jobs added a year ago. At 27,500, local TV news is now 400 below the all-time peak in 2009.

TV 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 TV	40.1	35	133	2.9	1	45	42.3	36	157
Big four affiliates	41.6	36	133	2.8	1	45	43.6	37	157
Other commercial	37.5	36	107	4.7	1	26	42.2	37.5	115
Non-commercial	6.1	4	15	1.4	0	7	7.6	8	15
Market size:									
1 - 25	65.7	73	133	6.7	2	34	68.3	66	157
26 - 50	63.2	65	110	5.1	3	45	68	70	128
51 - 100	43	43	110	1.9	1	14	45	45	110
101 - 150	29.4	28	51	2	1	13	31	29	54
151+	20.4	21	39	2	0	32	22.5	23	56

Overall, average full-time newsroom employment fell by 0.4 but median (typical) full-time newsroom employment remained exactly the same. Top 50 markets edged down – as did markets 101 to 150. Markets 51 to 100 and 151+ edged up. Big four network affiliates were virtually unchanged but other commercial and, especially, non-commercial stations dropped.

Average part-timers fell in markets 1 to 25 and 51 to 150; up in markets 26 to 50 and 151+. Median numbers of part-timers fell or remained the same in all markets. The biggest drop came in the largest markets.

TV staff size changes ... the past year (2019)

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Don't Know
All TV news	29%	18.1%	52.5%	0.4%
Big four affiliates	28.9	19.4	51.3	0.4
Other commercial	30	5	65	0

These numbers on the past year are remarkably close to the numbers reported a year ago. The percentage staying the same rose slightly – with about half coming from increase and half from decrease. There was no consistent relationship based on market or staff size, although markets 1 to 25 were more likely to increase staff than any other group. CBS and Fox affiliates were a

bit more likely to increase staff than others; ABC affiliates were less likely to cut staff than others; stations in the Midwest were the least likely to change one way or the other.

TV planned staff changes ... the next year (2020)

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV news	31.8%	3.9%	58.1%	6.2%
Big four affiliates	31.9	4.3	58.2	5.6
Other commercial	31.6	0	57.9	10.5

This table has historically been a pretty good predictor of the year to come. It came very close in predicting the staff increases this year, but it was 14 points low on the downside. Projections for 2020 are similar to a year ago. Stations in markets 51 to 100, staff of 21 to 30, ABC affiliates and stations in the South are most likely to expect to increase staff this year. Stations in the smallest markets, NBC affiliates and stations in the Midwest and West are most likely to expect to stay the same in staff size.

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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