

**Most Radio Stations Run Local News ... and a Little More of It Again This Year**  
**by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Lawrence Herbert School of Communication - Hofstra University Survey found that, overall, 68.2% of all radio stations in the survey report running local news: 70.8% of AM stations and 69.6% of FM stations. The overall percentage running news is down nearly half a point from a year ago, with AM stations down about two and a half points and FM up by three.

There was also little difference between commercial and non-commercial stations, with 68.1% of commercial stations running local news compared to 69% of non-commercial stations.

Note that we can't generalize these percentages to the radio universe because stations that run local news might well be more likely to participate in the RTDNA Survey than stations that do not.

In the radio survey, 75.9% of radio news directors and general managers say their station or station group is locally owned. That's up less than a point from a year ago.

**Average and median minutes of locally-produced radio news – 2020**

	Weekday average	Weekday median	Saturday average	Saturday median	Sunday average	Sunday median
All radio	88.4	45	25.5	0	20.7	0
Major market	147.3	62.5	67.5	0	57.2	0
Large market	67.1	35	18.4	0	17.2	0
Medium market	91.5	51	17.7	0	13.8	0
Small market	67.6	40	16.6	0	11.6	0
Commercial	98	48	34	0	27.4	0
Non-commercial	67.5	40	7.2	0	6.4	0

The average number of weekday minutes of news went up overall (by 8 minutes), mostly based on a big jump in medium markets. Other than that, the numbers are extremely close to a year ago. All the median (or typical) numbers are close or identical to a year ago. As usual, the larger the news staff, the more local news the station runs. Number of stations in the local cluster made no consistent difference. Stations in the Northeast run more local news than stations elsewhere. That's also the usual pattern.

**Changes in radio news in the last 12 months and planned for the future**

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
Amount of news the past year (2019)	16.7%	4.9%	77.9%	0.5%

Plan to change amount of news next year (2020)	15.1	1	77.6	6.3
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The percentage of stations that increased the amount of local news dropped by more than 6 points compared to a year ago. Virtually all of that moved over to the “same” category. The bigger the staff and the bigger the market, the more likely that local news content increased. Non-commercial stations were twice as likely to increase the amount of local news (25.2% versus 12.9%), but non-commercial stations were also two points more likely to decrease the amount of local news. No other variable made any consistent difference one way or the other.

Over the last few years, the planned amount of news has been a better and better predictor of changes in the coming year. Projected news for this year is down more than 3 points from a year ago. Non-commercial news directors are almost five times as likely to expect to increase local news as commercial news directors. They always say that (although not usually by this big a margin), but they’re also (almost) always right. The bigger the market and the bigger the staff, the more likely that the station expects to increase local news. Number of stations in the market and geography made no difference.

#### Changes in radio newscasts in the past year (2019)

	Added a newscast	Cut a newscast	Both added and cut	No change
All radio news	10.2%	6.3%	2.1%	81.5%
Major market	19.4	8.1	3.2	69.4
Large market	14.9	9.5	1.4	74.3
Medium market	9.2	3.8	0.8	86.2
Small market	3.4	6	3.4	87.2
Commercial	8.9	6.2	2.7	82.2
Non-commercial	12.9	6.5	0.8	79.8

Almost all the numbers in this table on radio newscasts went down – except “no change,” which rose by almost 10 points from a year ago. Added a newscast fell by five points, cut a newscast fell by three and added and cut dropped by a point and a half. Overall, major markets were largely unchanged from a year ago; the big shift to “same” came in all the other market sizes.

Newscast additions hit every single hour of the day from 5 am through 11 pm. Weekends, too. Morning drive, noon and afternoon drive all tied for the most often added newscasts.

Newscast cuts hit across the board as well, but afternoons, starting at 1 pm, were the most likely to get axed.

Note the rows won’t necessarily add up to 100% because some stations both added and cut newscasts.

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**

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