

What's New in Radio Websites - 2020 by Bob Papper

In radio, the percentage of news directors and general managers saying they started something important online gave up the five points it gained a year ago – back down below the halfway mark (48.5%). Non-commercial stations continued to run nearly 50% higher than commercial stations in doing something new. And, again, staff size made the difference. Staff sizes of 1 or 2 people were in the 30-percentile range in doing something new ... up to 88% doing something new with 10 or more news staffers. The bigger the market, the more likely to be doing something new online.

Nearly 200 radio news directors and general managers listed what they were doing in the latest RTDNA/Lawrence Herbert School of Communication - Hofstra University Survey.

At the top of the list came content, again, at 60.8% -- a 10-point jump from last year. What did that involve? More and better content ... video and pictures – lots of people noted that ... material just for the web, including surveys and polls ... specialty coverage on the web -- especially sports (at commercial stations) and election coverage, arts, education, breaking news, more in-depth news ... podcasts -- new or more -- noted by a quarter of the content category ... and real stories for the web and not just copies of aired scripts.

In their own words:

- Adding visual elements
- Encouraging more editors to report from their neighborhoods
- Greatly improved our graphics, including video inserts when appropriate
- More robust web/media builds for stories and special series
- Streaming audio and producing other newscasts for smart speakers
- We began podcasting a 30-minute live video program M-F, featuring interviews with local newsmakers and community leaders
- We're now posting virtually every local news story online, as well as full raw interviews with political candidates and other interesting people as part of our local news podcast.

At 19.3% came management/oversight/design/strategy. Managers noted better design, more graphics, more images ... hiring someone (or more people) to work just on digital content ... some just noted finally having a new or “real” website ... new or redesigned CMS (content management system) and analytics ... contests ... new or better apps.

In their own words:

- Actual news department planning

- The new website allowed us to post higher quality images and utilize more video (especially drone footage).

Next – just behind at 18.1% -- came social media. Mostly that involved more or greater emphasis on (and sometimes mandated posting) ... Facebook Live, which could also have been put into the content category above since it commonly involved news event coverage or special reports or newscasts ... Instagram ... general interaction with the audience, including an e-newsletter ... more social media promotion of station – a lot of mentions.

In their own words:

- Faster posting of breaking news - using social media to solicit feedback and questions.
- We are VERY active on Facebook, update almost hourly with local news stories

Advertising issues came in at 1.8%

Who has a website? 2020

All Radio	98.2%
Market Size	
Major	100
Large	100
Medium	97.7
Small	96.7
Commercial	98.1
Non-commercial	98.4

It's been 9 years since the last time a TV station didn't have a website, but radio still hasn't hit 100%. The percentage is up nearly three points from last year, but still shy of the all-time high of 98.9% back in 2016. Note that the question does NOT relate to all radio stations ... only those with local news.

How many websites include local news? 2020

All Radio	83.7%
Market Size	
Major	84.8
Large	85.1
Medium	80
Small	86.1
Commercial	80.9
Non-commercial	89.5

While all TV stations that run local news post that local news on the web, that's still not the case with radio. Radio numbers have bounced up and down within a narrow range over the years. This year, the overall number is up less than a point from a year ago. The percentage generally goes up with staff

size, but nothing else makes much difference. No grouping hit 100% -- not even stations with 10 or more news people.

Radio websites

In the past, I've asked about all the elements stations included in their website, like video, stills, calendars, etc. But as websites matured, changes had become few and mostly inconsequential. Starting two years ago, I just asked if stations had "added or eliminated anything meaningful" from the station website. Just over 80% (80.3%) said no. That's up a point and a half from last year. Generally, the bigger the staff, the more likely that the station changed the website in a meaningful way. No other criteria made much difference.

So what did the 20% do that was new and different?

As with the last couple years, it wasn't so much different as different for that particular website. Overwhelmingly, at 74.6%, most of the answers involved more and/or better content. That included more local news, specialized coverage, video, audio, and podcasts. Politics, features, updates, events, breaking news, interactive elements, more streaming, web only content.

In their own words:

- During election, hosted information about the ballot with interviews and bios
- Jumbo Tron with information
- Local news page; written news gave way to a recorded podcast.
- Much more content with expanded staff.
- We do a Summer and a Holiday Guide with features and safety information produced totally in house and are trying to move it from print to all digital
- We have added significantly more in-depth journalism content
- We now offer added content versions of many local news stories, expanding upon what was aired.

Technical changes came in at 9%. That included a new CMS and other software changes to the website.

Also at 9% came website deletions: streaming, video, podcasts, or just less local news. All related to budget cuts.

In their own words:

- Extra streaming channels eliminated due to budget cuts
- No more headlines from our local newspaper due to it being shut down

4.5% of the comments related to strategy: digital first, mobile apps.

Then there were a couple mentions of advertising-related changes.

Percentage of web content that's only on the web - 2020

All Radio	16.8%
Market Size	
Major market	24.2
Large market	17.9
Medium market	13
Small market	16.3
Commercial	17
Non-commercial	16.5

After a big drop two years ago, unique web content edged up a point and a half last year ... and then gave up most of that this time around. The biggest change came among non-commercial stations, which largely caught up to commercial stations this year after lagging well behind.

Percentage of web content that's user-generated - 2020

All Radio	12.2%
Market Size	
Major market	13.7
Large market	8.9
Medium market	12.6
Small market	13
Commercial	12.7
Non-commercial	11.1

Overall, user-generated content on the web fell more than two points from last year. Major markets and non-commercial stations were up. All other market sizes and commercial stations, overall, went down.

Web traffic

Note that 75% of radio news directors and general managers didn't know the website traffic numbers. The response on this is a bit thin, so view these numbers cautiously.

Radio station website traffic during the past 30 days - 2020

	Page Views (in thousands)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All Radio	377	120
Market Size		
Major market	959	313
Large Market	159	35
Medium market	204	72
Small market	128	25
Commercial	416	97
Non-commercial	317	155

Overall page views and unique visitors are both up noticeably from last year, but all of the increase came from major markets. All other market sizes went down.

Web staffing numbers and newsroom participation in working on the web are included in the staffing article. Web profitability and paywalls are discussed in the business of news articles.

Podcasts

Podcasts are getting a lot more attention in radio than at TV stations. The median (typical) number of podcasts at a TV newsroom is zero, and the average is less than half. In radio, the average number of podcasts is over two – although the median (typical) number is also zero.

How many different podcasts do you run per week?

	Average Number	Median Number
All Radio	2.2	0
Market Size		
Major market	2.6	1.5
Large market	2.7	1
Medium market	2.7	0
Small market	1.1	0
Commercial	2.1	0
Non-commercial	2.2	1
Geography		
Northeast	3.7	1
Midwest	1.9	0
South	2.1	0
West	1.7	0

Overwhelmingly – at 75.2% -- stations report that they're running the same number of podcasts this year compared to last year. Typically, of course, that's zero, but it depends on market size. Major and large markets most often have one or more podcasts; medium and small markets most often do not. 22.5% say they're running more, and 2.3% say fewer. The bigger the staff, the more likely the answer is more.

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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