

TV Efforts with OTT and NextGen TV **by Bob Papper**

This is the second year for the RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey question: What, if anything, are you doing with OTT? It's the first year that I've asked what, if anything, stations are doing with NextGen TV.

OTT stands for over the top (sometimes called internet television or online television), and while there's some disagreement over exactly what qualifies as over the top, it generally refers to program material that consumers receive via streaming rather than via cable, satellite or telco. Most commonly, that content has arrived at consumers via Hulu or Roku or YouTube, but more and more companies are setting up their own services: fuboTV, PlayStation Vue, Netflix, Amazon Prime, SlingTV, NBC Peacock, CBS All Access, Apple TV, androidtv, TVision, tubi, Filmrise,

- Tegna's (and Gray's) Premion
- Sinclair's STIRR and CompulseOTT
- CBSN (city)
- Local X (NBC)
- Disney+

NextGen TV or ATSC 3.0 is the third generation of digital TV technology. It involves enhanced picture and sound quality and, combined with an internet connection, allows for a level of interactivity and addressability that hasn't been possible before. In order to get NextGen TV, consumers must buy a NextGen-enabled TV. ATSC 3.0 is not compatible with earlier digital TVs. And consumers will need an antenna because it's not available (yet) via cable or satellite. At this writing, NextGen TV is operating in 24 markets and should be operational in another 15 by the time this is published.

OTT

A bit surprising (at least to me) is that doing "something" with OTT only edged up from 53.8% last year to 55.2% this time around. Top 25 markets, at 72%, are much more likely to be involved with OTT, but after that, the numbers don't vary that much. The smallest newsrooms are generally less likely to be involved.

So what are stations doing with OTT this year? The most common answers involved streaming (which, of course, is what OTT is) -- particularly news, newscasts, news on demand, breaking news, COVID news, archive material.

Quite a few stations are operating or setting up 24/5 or 24/7 news content. A lot of stations are or have set up OTT desks to operate/oversee the OTT operation.

In their own words:

- 24/7 OTT content, every reporter turns OTT version of their story
- 5 Streams and VOD; 2 OTT-only shows/day

- All feeds and stories are available on OTT
- All newscasts are on demand on streaming. We also stream individual story videos on a different channel
- Breaking news, weather and sports ... and developing other regular programming for 2021
- Creating programming outside of on-air
- Fully program 24/7 schedule; newscasts that are streaming only; breaking news and weather coverage on streaming
- Installing "desk" to provide updates directly to OTT
- OTT desk, dozens of videos from our archives
- Posting newscasts, updating every 5 hours, posting special programming, newscasts, etc.
- Producing unique content for our branded OTT channel
- Stream live and add new video content throughout day, beef up current channels with content
- We are preparing an OTT/digital desk for live streaming and other purposes
- Working to install an OTT desk where exclusive digital content, including but not limited to breaking news, can be streamed on OTT apps

OTT is clearly still a work in progress, but the answers to the question on what stations are doing and why are much more concrete and specific this time around.

Is OTT allowing you to ...

	Reach new audiences	Go deeper with content	Make extra revenue	Tell stories you wouldn't otherwise tell	Get more feedback from the audience	Too early to tell
All TV	57.8%	29.9%	24.7%	11.7%	8.4%	57.8%
Market						
1 – 25	64.3	42.9	35.7	14.3	3.6	53.6
26 – 50	83.3	38.9	16.7	11.1	5.6	33.3
51 – 100	53.2	27.7	27.7	8.5	8.5	59.6
101 – 150	52.9	23.5	20.6	11.8	8.8	70.6
151+	48.1	22.2	18.5	14.8	14.8	59.3

Note that the two biggest winners are “reach new audiences” and “too early to tell.” They won last year as well. Both were up slightly from a year ago. So was “go deeper with content.” The other three choices were all down from a year ago.

NextGen TV ... ATSC 3.0

A new question this year: What, if anything, are you doing with NextGen TV (ATSC 3.0)? Some TV companies (especially Sinclair and Nexstar) see this as critical to the future of local TV; others are not as sure. The key idea behind NextGen TV or ATSC 3.0 is a merging of television and internet technologies. Through changes in compression, it allows a higher quality (4K) picture and better audio. But the reason TV companies are particularly interested in NextGen is addressability. Because of the internet connection, it allows stations to tailor commercials to specific zip codes or even homes.

That could enhance station profits. But consumers have to play their part in this. NextGen TV is not compatible with most of today's TVs, so consumers have to care enough to spend more money for a NextGen TV. You need a special tuner, and right now, you can only get real NextGen TV over the air -- which means an antenna. And being able to watch in 4K only means something to the extent that someone's producing 4K material, and there isn't much of that yet.

More and more TV markets are starting to feed at least some material for NextGen, but we're a long way from knowing if the average (or even enough high end) consumer will care.

Overall, just 12.3% of TV news directors reported doing "something" with NextGen TV. The number peaked at 25% in the top 25 markets.

The specific answers to what they're doing weren't very specific:

- Already broadcast an ATSC 3.0 signal. We're among the leaders in this new technology
- Getting ready - company is preparing to use ATSC 3.0 for distribution
- Getting ready with equipment
- Got it, haven't figured it out yet
- Not sure
- Handled at corporate level
- Planning programming, built tower - Sinclair project with Nexstar
- Preparation for transition
- We are a test station. ATSC 3.0 install not complete
- We have one of the experimental transmitters, and the engineers are testing various equipment with it
- We may be experimenting with direct broadband services to viewers
- Working toward implementing

That's a pretty good cross-section of the comments on NextGen – and almost half the total comments. More next year (probably).

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About the Survey

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2020 among all 1,762 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,379 radio stations. Valid responses came from as many as 1,358 television stations (77.1%) and 765 radio news directors and general managers representing 2,310 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.