

## **Local Radio News Working at Innovation by Bob Papper**

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that nearly half (46.4%) of radio news directors and general managers reported that they were doing something innovative in radio news. That 46.4% on innovation is down about 3 points from a year ago, which was down 5 points from the year before. But it's been a tough year.

### **Radio news innovation**

Non-commercial stations were almost exactly twice as likely to say they did something innovative compared to commercial stations. The bigger the news staff and the bigger the market, the more likely that a station or station group did something innovative or tried something innovative. Ownership, number of stations in the local cluster and geography made no difference.

The nearly 200 responses this year really fell into three broad categories.

At 40%, came COVID-related content and COVID-related remote working:

- Created a COVID-19 news page and daily updates
- More news gathering from local sources without going to meetings, police briefings, etc. because of COVID-19
- We produced a series of short video vignettes to document how life changed during the coronavirus lockdowns
- We've gotten very skilled at virtual everything. Some of those likely will remain useful post-pandemic

Content came in a strong second at 36%. The biggest vote-getters within content were new podcasts and new, expanded, re-emphasized local news coverage:

- "You Don't Say," a collaborative project with a local black history organization
- Carrying live briefing from governor's office. Carrying virtual graduation ceremony. Increased video streaming and carrying local meetings virtually
- We have also increased the amount of local news stories we're producing
- Live streaming meetings of interest. Actual coverage of government - originating news content
- More time spent on high-value content: in-depth stories; hour-long public affairs shows on serious issues in our community
- Translation of local news breaks into local minority languages (Orono, Arabic, Vietnamese, Spanish)

Strategic efforts came in at 24%. That included new and more staff, partnering with others, new or re-emphasized social media, new mobile apps, new websites, new station newsletter:

- Add people who can actually report, not just read
- Crushing the newspaper competition. Having to stay home all day, I listen in on every Zoom meeting and post the news immediately on social media
- Daily newsletter with top stories -- it has been very popular. Running digest/blog of stories on our website - some links to reporter stories, as well as briefs. We are in the planning stages for a morning podcast with the day's top stories for people who want to listen to local news on their own schedule
- Developed a Facebook page that directly linked residents of our region to specific coronavirus stories we produced on our website. Led to a huge traffic increase to our station website
- Listening sessions each week to review stories
- More emphasis on social media and web page reporting
- Streamlined our editing process and began discussions to challenge our usual protocols and traditions
- Using Social Media to collect leads for stories due to lack of staff

You could reasonably argue that COVID coverage is content and working remotely is strategic.. That's fine, see it that way. And this comment might best sum up the year:

- Survived a pandemic and worldwide social unrest

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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.