

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

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that, overall, 70.4% of all radio stations in the Survey report running local news: 75.7% of AM stations and 68.3% of FM stations. The overall percentage running news is up two points from a year ago with AM stations accounting for all of the increase. AM stations went up nearly 5 points while FM stations dropped a point.

There was also little difference between commercial and non-commercial stations, with 70.5% of commercial stations running local news compared to 69.7% of non-commercial stations. Those numbers are little changed from past years. Comparing the airing of local news by ownership, 75.7% of locally-owned radio stations run local news versus 88.2% of non-locally-owned stations. The numbers came out that way last year, too.

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

### Average and median minutes of locally-produced radio news – 2021

	Weekday average	Weekday median	Saturday average	Saturday median	Sunday average	Sunday median
All radio	92.1	50.5	31.5	0	27.3	0
Major market	154.2	50	83.7	2	88.5	0
Large market	71.9	48	20	0	22.9	0
Medium market	83.2	60	22.7	0	12.3	0
Small market	83.4	50	21.8	2	15.5	0
Commercial	101.6	58	38.2	0	31.5	0
Non-commercial	65.7	40	12.7	0	15.7	0

The average number of weekday minutes of news went up overall by less than 4 minutes, with all market sizes except medium markets going up modestly. Last year, medium markets led a small overall increase in local news. Weekday median – or typical – number of minutes is now fairly close from one market size to the next. Radio stations typically still do not run local news on the weekend.

The reason that the average weekday minutes in major markets is so much higher than all others is because that's where most of the all-news stations are. Note that those stations have little effect on the median or typical number of minutes.

### 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 (2020)	27.1%	5.5%	66.5%	0.8%
Plan to change amount of news next year (2021)	13.6	2.1	73	11.3

The percentage of stations that increased the amount of local news rose by more than 10 points compared to a year ago. The percentage decreasing local news stayed about the same. 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 (44.1% to 21.1%) compared to commercial ones. Stations in the West were more likely to increase local news than any other region. Otherwise, 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. The biggest change in planned amount of news for 2021 is a five-point increase in “not sure.” Otherwise, the numbers are almost exactly the same as a year ago.

Non-commercial news directors are almost four times as likely to expect to increase local news as commercial news directors. They always say that, but they’re also (almost) always right. The bigger the staff, the more likely that the station expects to increase local news. Stations in the West are more likely to expect to increase news, but no other variable made much difference.

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.

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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.