

What's New in Radio Websites - 2021

by Bob Papper

In radio, the percentage of news directors and general managers saying they started something important online regained the five points it lost a year ago – to come in just over the halfway mark at 52.6%. The bigger the market, the bigger the staff and non-commercial radio led the way.

More than 200 radio news directors and general managers listed what they were doing in the latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey.

At the top of the list came content, again, at 79% -- a nearly 20-point jump from last year. What did that involve? More and better content, video and pictures, material just for the web, including surveys and polls, specialty coverage, especially sports (at commercial stations) and election coverage, arts, education, breaking news, more in-depth news, and podcasts -- new or more of them. But at a quarter of the total mentions, came COVID: updates, special pages, links to help people, services provided for, closed businesses, open businesses.

In their own words:

- Added more embedded media, including audio, to online stories
- Adding a daily news brief to website and emailed to station database
- Blog-style posts during big breaking stories, voter guide
- Daily updates on local COVID information, along with links to updates from our State Dept. of Public Health and governor
- Long-form stories

At 15% 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.

In their own words:

- Better control and consistency with uploading content
- Daily live Facebook updates, TV-style package reports
- Forming a digital team and coming up with a company-wide digital strategy
- Launched daily local newspaper
- Posting more news during more hours of the day
- Upgraded our news site to feature enterprise beat reporting

At just 4% came promotion, marketing, advertising, including contests.

Apps – without more explanation – came in at 2%

Who has a website? 2021

All Radio	97.8%
Market Size	
Major	100
Large	99
Medium	97.6
Small	96
Commercial	97.3
Non-commercial	99.2

It's been a decade since the last time a TV station didn't have a website, but radio still hasn't hit 100%. The percentage is almost exactly the same as last year and 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? 2021

All Radio	81.2%
Market Size	
Major	89.3
Large	80.2
Medium	82
Small	76
Commercial	78.1
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 down a couple points 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 three years ago, I just asked if stations had "added or eliminated anything meaningful" from the station website. More than three-quarters (76.2%) said no. That's down a couple points from last year. Generally, the bigger the staff and the bigger the market, the more likely that the station changed the website in a meaningful way. No other criteria made much difference.

So what did the 23.8% do that was new and different?

As with the last couple years, it wasn't so much different as different for that particular website.

COVID and the election accounted for nearly half (47%) of all the answers. More than 20% said more or better local content, and most of the rest of the answers could have been put under that heading as well. Three percent reported less news and content.

In their own words:

- Added pages regarding cancelations, COVID dining guide, CARES act applications
- Citizen's agenda election guide, survey, and solutions journalism
- Daily news digest, questions aimed at driving community engagement and sourcing for news reporters and talk shows, and a redesign
- More photography, video, long-form stories (short version on the air, longer version with links online)
- Our website got much more comprehensive with local news this year. We've added lots of new features to help tell the coronavirus story. We're currently developing a template for special projects presentations on the site

Percentage of web content that's only on the web - 2021

All Radio	17.8%
Market Size	
Major market	24.7
Large market	20.5
Medium market	16.9
Small market	12.6
Commercial	18.4
Non-commercial	16.4

The percentage of digital-only content has tended to bounce up and down from one year to the next. This year, it's up a point. The bigger the market, the larger the staff, the greater the percentage of digital-only content.

Percentage of web content that's user-generated - 2021

All Radio	13.4%
Market Size	
Major market	11.5
Large market	15.4
Medium market	12.8
Small market	13.9
Commercial	14.1
Non-commercial	11.9

Overall, user-generated content on the web rose by a point from last year. Last year was down two points from the year before. All market sizes except major went up from a year ago.

Web traffic

Note that more than three-quarters of radio news directors and general managers don'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 - 2021

	Page Views (in thousands)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All Radio	894	262
Market Size		
Major market	1,340	509
Large Market	1,592	302
Medium market	373	55
Small market	646	167
Commercial	984	240
Non-commercial	687	321

Overall page views and unique visitors are both up substantially from last year, and, with one exception, it's across the board with all market sizes. Note the huge change in numbers between large and metro markets as opposed to medium and small markets.

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 one-half. In contrast, the average number of podcasts in radio went up from 2.2 last year to 3 this time around. Still, in radio, the overall median number of podcasts remains at zero. The median number rose for major markets from 1.5 last year to 2 this year. Large markets remained at a median of one, and medium and small markets remained at zero.

How many different podcasts do you run per week?

	Average Number	Median Number
All Radio	3	0
Market Size		
Major market	4.8	2
Large market	3	1
Medium market	2.9	0
Small market	1.9	0
Commercial	3.1	0
Non-commercial	2.5	1
Geography		
Northeast	3.6	0
Midwest	3.1	1
South	2.1	0
West	3.3	0

Overwhelmingly – at 75.2% -- stations report that they're running the same number of podcasts this year compared to last year. That's the exact same figure as a year ago.

20% said they're running more, and 4.9% said they're running fewer. More is down a couple points from last year and fewer is up a couple.

Non-commercial stations and stations in metro and large markets are most likely to be running more podcasts. The bigger the staff, the more likely the answer is more.

Apps

The percentage of radio stations with apps fell for the second year in a row – down to 58.9%. Not a big drop, but I'd have expected the percentage to increase over time instead of heading the other way. Two years ago, 63% of radio stations had at least one app; last year it was 61.9%.

Non-commercial stations are more likely to have an app, 63.7% versus 56.9%, but commercial stations have more apps per station. Overall, the average station had 1.2 apps, but the median remained at 1.

Market size made no difference, except that the smallest markets were less likely to have an app. The bigger the staff and the bigger the newsroom, the more likely that a station has an app. Stations in the West were less likely to have an app.

One station – a small market commercial station in the South -- charged for its app. That was the only one.

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.

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 article.

Note that there's a fine line between online and social media ... so be sure to check the social media article.

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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.