

## **In 2021, Most of What's New in TV Continues to be Online** **by Bob Papper**

Once again, the RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey received well over 200 responses to the question, "What's the most important new thing the TV station is doing online?"

All told, 68.5% of news directors said they were doing something new in digital. That's a drop of about 7 points from last year. Generally, the bigger the market and the bigger the staff, the more likely that the station did something new in digital. Network affiliation made no difference, but stations in the Northeast and West ran a bit higher than stations in the Midwest and South.

The challenge in analyzing the responses to a question like this is trying to categorize responses in such a way that there's something meaningful that you can take away from an amazingly disparate collection of responses.

Overall, 40% of the answers related to streaming and OTT (over the top). This included things like an emphasis on streaming or ramping up streaming or OTT. I included answers about an OTT or digital desk here because it so often was linked to streaming. Also, YouTube, Facebook Live (which was mostly more of but also less of) and Instagram.

In their own words:

- A 24/7 wheel of OTT news content including local and national news
- Increasing live streaming of important news conferences and news events, added the ability to take Zoom live directly through OBS, offering up more conversational digital specials as opposed to on-air specials where viewers can ask questions
- Launched "digital channel" with webcasts, anchored live event coverage, live interviews

Management and strategy combined for 29% of the answers. Yes, you can argue that establishing a digital desk is management/strategy, but since it was more often linked specifically to streaming, that's where it went. This category also includes people – more of, redeployment of, changing assignments of. Promotion fell into this category along with developing or changing digital strategy. Adding more video seemed a strategic decision, so that went here, too. Also, a new CMS, training, and OBS Studio (Open Broadcaster Software).

In their own words:

- Assigning specific digital responsibilities to field crews
- Became more digitally-focused with digital specific stories. Chased TV stories less
- Clearly, we converted numerous positions from assignment desk, producer and MMJ to digital only
- Data-driven project focusing on content goals and news analytics to determine content strategy
- Getting the whole newsroom trained to contribute

- Hired a digital data reporter to produce exclusive, data-driven content for the web
- Naming an assistant ND of streaming/OTT - and beginning to build content under that umbrella
- Running a digital newsroom largely independent of the broadcast newsroom
- We are building a digital team so there is someone responsible for keeping us on task following our digital strategy. Also, I wrote a digital strategy for us to follow
- We are really JUST getting our digital ramped up
- We've begun to use our digital analytics as a real-time view of what people want to see, and we use that information to guide our day and story choices

Content comprised 24% of the responses. Sure, streaming involves streaming content, so the categorization depended on the emphasis of the answer. Included here were answers about running more digital content, special projects on jobs, restaurants, court cases, businesses remaining open, sports, weather and, most often, COVID.

In their own words:

- "Getting Answers" segments for COVID info
- COVID-19 section, extensive livestreaming of all official briefings related to it

5% of the responses addressed special features that stations worked on. Yes, most involved content, but the emphasis of the answer was on the delivery system rather than what was being delivered. Newsletters, podcasts, and efforts with Alexa led the way here.

Other was just 2%.

I didn't ask whether a TV station has a website because it's been a decade since the last time a TV station that runs local news didn't have one.

I've also stopped asking whether a station website had certain online elements like video, stills, calendars, etc. 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. Nearly three-quarters, 72.5%, said no. That's down six points from a year ago.

So what did the 27% add or cut?

First, almost all of what was added was content, so we're not talking about new concepts, we're talking about new content added to a station's website.

Not surprisingly, the big addition was information on the coronavirus, at 39.5% of all changes. In second place was special projects, at 9.2%. Those two take us to nearly half of all changes.

Election/political and live streams came in at 8% each.

Five percent involved Spanish language newscasts or story translation. Everything else just got one or two mentions, including a new content management system (CMS), a new podcast, a jobs board, OTT, weather, sports and so on.

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

<b>All TV</b>	24.7%
Markets 1-25	29.1
Markets 26-50	26
Markets 51-100	23.2
Markets 101-150	22.6
Markets 151+	25.3
Staff size	
51+	27.2
31 - 50	24.9
21 - 30	25.2
11 - 20	19.5
1 - 10	24.5

Overall, web content that's only on the web remained almost exactly the same as a year ago, which was exactly the same as the year before. Big talk about digital-only content doesn't seem to result in increases of digital-only content. There were no meaningful differences among network affiliates or based on region.

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

<b>All TV</b>	10%
Markets 1-25	9.8
Markets 26-50	12.6
Markets 51-100	10.6
Markets 101-150	7.8
Markets 151+	10.1
Staff size	
51+	12.4
31 - 50	10
21 - 30	11.7
11 - 20	4.2
1 - 10	6.3

User-generated content on the web rose 2 points from last year, which still puts it a point and a half behind two years ago. Most sub-groups went up a point or two. Fox affiliates were noticeably lower than all others.

### Web traffic

#### TV station website traffic during the past 30 days - 2021

	Page Views (in thousands)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All TV	5,139	1,601
Market Size		
1-25	8,990	2,857
26-50	8,592	2,561
51-100	5,069	1,512
101-150	3,223	777
151+	2,202	693

With just one exception, page views and unique visitors were uniformly up this past year. And most of the gains were substantial. The one exception was page views for stations in markets 101 to 150. 41% of news directors said they didn't know the numbers. That's up from 31% last year and a surprise. Not knowing page views and visitors is the same as not knowing how much TV audience you have. Makes it hard to figure out if what you're doing is right or wrong. The percentage not knowing web audience figures was erratic by market size. Generally, as staff size decreased, knowledge of web audience did too. Still, 34% of news directors with the largest staffs were unable to answer the question.

## Podcasts

Podcasts are getting more and more attention in media trade journals, but they're still not getting much attention at TV stations. The median (typical) number of podcasts at a TV newsroom is zero, and the average is just half a podcast.

### How many different podcasts do you run per week?

	Average Number	Median Number
All TV	0.5	0
Market Size		
1-25	0.9	0
26-50	0.8	0
51-100	0.5	0
101-150	0.5	0
151+	0.3	0
Staff Size		
51+	1.3	0
31-50	0.4	0
21-30	0.3	0
11-20	0.1	0
1-10	0.7	0

Note that the median number of podcasts – zero – is true for every subgroup of TV stations except non-commercial stations, where the median number is two. Overwhelmingly – at 85.2% -- stations report that they're running the same number of podcasts this year compared to last year. Mostly, of course, that's zero. 10.1% say they're running more, and 4.6% say fewer. The percentage saying they're running more is down substantially from last year (10.1%), and the percentage saying fewer is up from last year's 2.2%.

## Apps

The percentage of TV stations with apps edged up to 96.2%. Up half a point from last year. Stations without any apps hit almost every category. In other words, while there weren't many non-participants, they were spread out across almost all subgroups. Except the Northeast, where every station had at least one.

Once again, both the average (2.2) and median (2) number of apps per station were about two. The top station had 60 apps (that's what they said), and every market size had stations with 3 to 4 or more apps.

Two stations reported charging for apps. Both were at “other commercial” stations in top 25 markets. 99.5% of TV stations did not charge for apps, and not a single big four network affiliate charged for an app.

***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.***

***Bob Papper is Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Digital Media at Syracuse University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. This research was supported by the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and the Radio Television Digital News Association.***

### **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.