

Salaries Soar

While real wages remain slightly below the high watermark of 2000, salaries surged across the board in 2003.

By Bob Papper

After two down years, the latest RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey found double-digit increases in both television and radio news salaries at the end of 2003. Television news salaries rose 10 percent, and radio news salaries were up 11.8 percent from a year ago. The increases weren't uniform—some positions rose considerably more than others, and certain market sizes fared better than others. But with inflation a low 1.9 percent for the year, real wages (salary minus inflation) in broadcast news recovered all of the losses of the past couple years. Salaries peaked in the fourth quarter of 2000. The latest figures are up 2.2 percent from that all-time high. On the other hand, with inflation at 5.9 percent since 2000, real wages remain below that high watermark.

Television News Salaries

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$78,900	\$68,000	\$9,000	\$260,000
Assistant News Director	64,000	60,000	22,000	170,000
Managing Editor	59,100	53,000	23,000	133,000
Executive Producer	51,500	46,000	17,000	125,000
Assignment Editor	33,200	32,000	16,000	70,000
News Producer	31,000	28,000	16,000	80,000
News Anchor	72,200	59,500	10,000	400,000
Weathercaster	58,700	50,000	10,000	215,000
Sports Anchor	51,600	40,000	10,000	200,000
News Reporter	33,700	28,000	10,700	125,000
News Writer	29,700	27,000	14,000	80,000
News Assistant	22,700	21,000	5,500	55,000
Sports Reporter	32,600	28,000	16,000	125,000
Photographer	28,900	25,000	10,700	75,000
Tape Editor	26,700	23,000	8,500	70,000
Graphics Specialist	30,200	30,000	13,000	50,000
Internet Specialist	34,800	34,500	7,000	65,000

In television, the salaries rose for all positions except news assistant and photographer. The biggest jumps went to Internet specialist, graphics specialist and news anchor, with weathercaster and managing editor not far behind. As a group, managing editor fell quite a bit last year, so much of this year's increase made up for last year's drop. There were also strong salary gains for sports anchor and sports reporter. All other groups rose 6 to 9 percent. With inflation a low 1.9 percent, most positions experienced noticeable or strong real wage growth.

Radio News Salaries

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$36,800	\$35,500	\$18,000	\$110,000
News Anchor	30,100	30,000	15,000	45,000
News Reporter	24,200	25,000	2,000	40,000
News Producer	29,400	25,000	18,000	43,000
Sports Anchor	31,000	30,000	18,000	60,000
Sports Reporter	18,600	20,000	10,000	25,000

At an overall 11.8 percent increase, radio news salaries rose even more than television news salaries. News director and sports anchor saw the biggest jumps; news anchor was the only group to grow below inflation's modest 1.9 percent.

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size

	1-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	150+
News Director	\$100,000	\$120,000	\$80,000	\$60,000	\$50,000
Assistant News Director	100,000	75,000	55,000	47,800	35,500
Managing Editor	80,000	60,000	50,000	42,000	32,000
Executive Producer	72,500	62,000	45,000	40,000	29,000
Assignment Editor	42,000	36,500	32,000	28,000	21,000
News Producer	48,000	38,000	28,000	22,000	20,000
News Anchor	115,000	107,500	65,000	47,300	30,000
Weathercaster	88,000	85,500	59,000	42,000	30,000
Sports Anchor	85,000	80,500	46,000	32,000	26,000
News Reporter	52,500	41,300	30,000	23,000	20,000
News Writer	37,000	25,000	20,800	20,000	22,000
News Assistant	34,500	28,000	19,000	16,000	15,000
Sports Reporter	42,000	40,000	28,000	22,000	20,000
Photographer	44,000	34,500	25,500	20,000	19,000
Tape Editor	40,000	27,500	20,000	18,200	17,100
Graphics Specialist	33,000	29,000	30,000	25,500	17,500
Internet Specialist	52,500	43,000	31,000	29,000	24,500

The bigger the market, the bigger the salary. At the same time, salaries for the Top 25 markets probably understate top salary levels because some of the biggest stations in that category did not fill out the salary data. Those omissions have little effect overall but will understate market 1-25 data in this table. The table also shows that in broadcast as well as other areas, it's the rich who tend to get richer. By far, the largest salary growth came in Top 25 markets, followed by markets 26-50. All other groups were in single digits, with the smallest markets actually having a slightly larger gain than markets 101-150, followed by markets 51-100.

Median TV News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size

	51+	31-50	21-30	11-20	1-10
News Director	\$126,000	\$75,500	\$57,000	\$49,000	\$39,000
Assistant News Director	76,000	52,500	42,000	38,000	22,000
Managing Editor	65,000	50,000	34,000	33,000	*
Executive Producer	62,000	45,000	40,000	31,500	*
Assignment Editor	40,000	32,500	27,500	23,000	25,000
News Producer	40,000	27,000	21,500	21,000	28,000
News Anchor	110,000	60,000	40,000	30,000	20,000
Weathercaster	89,000	50,000	32,000	30,000	19,800
Sports Anchor	86,500	40,500	30,000	25,000	17,500
News Reporter	45,000	27,000	22,000	20,000	19,500
News Writer	30,000	21,500	18,000	*	*
News Assistant	28,000	18,000	9,000	13,000	22,000
Sports Reporter	40,000	27,000	20,000	20,000	28,000
Photographer	37,000	25,000	21,500	19,500	21,000
Tape Editor	29,000	20,000	16,000	16,600	18,000
Graphics Specialist	32,500	28,000	20,000	17,000	27,500
Internet Specialist	38,500	31,000	24,500	*	*

Staff size may be a cleaner determinant of salary than market size; there were few exceptions to the rule that the larger the staff, the higher the salary. Most of the exceptions involved the smallest staff size, because that includes both very small staff at small market stations along with independents with small staffs in big markets. Interestingly, despite the strong upward salary trend, almost all the positions at the smallest staff level dropped in salary from a year ago. Most network affiliates showed similar salaries, although Fox stations were a little higher, and PBS stations were a lot lower. Regionally, stations in the Northeast paid the most, followed by the West and South, with the Midwest trailing the others—as it has the past several years.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size

	Major	Large	Medium	Small
News Director	\$51,000	\$41,500	\$32,000	\$25,000
News Anchor	40,000	35,000	25,000	21,500
News Reporter	33,000	24,000	23,000	20,000
News Producer	38,000	20,000	24,000	32,000
Sports Anchor	*	45,000	35,000	21,000
Sports Reporter	*	25,000	15,000	19,000

The biggest overall salary growth came in large and small markets, with medium and major markets lagging well behind. Major markets are those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are those from 250,001 to 1 million, medium markets are from 50,000 to 250,000, and small markets have fewer than 50,000 listeners.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size

	One	Two	Three or More
News Director	\$30,000	\$26,000	\$40,000
News Anchor	*	32,500	30,000
News Reporter	*	20,000	28,000
News Producer	*	40,000	25,000
Sports Anchor	*	25,000	32,500
Sports Reporter	*	20,000	19,000

As in the past, when radio stations have three or more full-time news staff members, salaries generally go up.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Ownership

	Group-Owned	Independent
News Director	\$32,000	\$40,000
News Anchor	26,500	40,000
News Reporter	24,000	26,000
News Producer	25,000	32,000
Sports Anchor	30,000	29,000
Sports Reporter	19,000	20,000

As with every year since we started asking, radio news salaries for the top three positions (news director, news anchor and news reporter) are actually lower at group-owned stations than at independents. This year, only sports anchor deviated from that pattern—and only barely.

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations Served/Supervised

	One	Two	Three or More
News Director	\$38,000	\$40,000	\$32,000
News Anchor	28,500	38,500	25,000
News Reporter	30,000	24,000	24,000
News Producer	*	32,000	25,000
Sports Anchor	*	38,500	25,000
Sports Reporter	*	20,000	19,000

News directors who supervise one or two stations make more than those who supervise three or more stations. Last year was the one and only time that wasn't the case. Note that salaries are generally higher where there are one or two stations rather than three or more.

*Insufficient data



Median TV News Salary Comparisons Over Time

	2004	1999	5-Year Percentage Change	1994	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+12.4%		+23.1%
News Director	\$68,000	\$56,000	+21.4	\$52,800	+28.8
Assistant News Director	60,000	50,000	+20.0	45,000	+33.3
Managing Editor	53,000	47,500	+11.6	42,600	+24.4
Executive Producer	46,000	40,000	+15.0	37,500	+22.7
Assignment Editor	32,000	29,300	+9.2	27,400	+16.8
News Producer	28,000	24,000	+16.7	22,900	+22.3
News Anchor	59,500	44,000	+35.2	54,300	+9.6
Weathercaster	50,000	40,000	+25.0	44,900	+11.4
Sports Anchor	40,000	33,000	+21.2	44,400	-9.9
News Reporter	28,000	24,000	+16.7	24,200	+15.7
News Writer	27,000	24,000	+12.5	NA	NA
News Assistant	21,000	20,000	+5.0	NA	NA
Sports Reporter	28,000	22,000	+27.3	NA	NA
Photographer	25,000	23,000	+8.7	21,600	+15.7
Tape Editor	23,000	22,000	+4.5	NA	NA
Graphics Specialist	30,000	24,000	+25.0	NA	NA
Internet Specialist	34,500	26,000	+32.7	NA	NA

Inflation has grown by 12.4 percent in the past five years and by 23.1 percent in the past 10 years. So growth (or loss) in real wages in those periods is the difference between inflation and the change in percentage. For the past five years, most positions rose beyond inflation, led by Internet specialist and news anchor. Others lost ground, particularly assignment editor, photographer, news assistant and tape editor. But some of those numbers don't tell the bigger story: The past decade has seen only modest salary gains. Over the past 10 years, sports anchor is actually down 9.9 percent—the only group to drop over that period. In the past decade, only three positions saw growth in real wages: assistant news director, news director and managing editor—all management positions.

Median Radio News Salary Comparisons Over Time

	2004	1999	5-Year Percentage Change	1994	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+12.4%		+23.1%
News Director	\$35,500	\$25,000	+42.0	\$23,200	+53.0
News Anchor	30,000	23,000	+30.4	23,100	+29.9
News Reporter	25,000	24,000	+4.2	16,400	+52.4
News Producer	25,000	26,000	-3.8	NA	NA
Sports Anchor	30,000	24,000	+25.0	NA	NA
Sports Reporter	20,000	NA	NA	NA	NA

Overall, radio salaries have done well in the past five and 10 years—at least for those remaining in the business. News director, news anchor and sports anchor all came in well ahead of inflation over the past five years. News reporter has gained little in that period, and news producer has dropped. Over the past decade, all three positions for which we have figures (news director, news reporter and news anchor) increased well above the inflation rate.



TV Newspeople Under Contract and Non-Competes

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	33.0%	81.8%
Assistant News Director	46.6	85.4
Managing Editor	46.8	75.9
Executive Producer	58.1	77.1
Assignment Editor	25.9	81.0
News Producer	61.9	80.5
News Anchor	90.4	85.4
Weathercaster	86.2	85.7
Sports Anchor	84.4	85.5
News Reporter	77.1	86.5
News Writer	2.6	100.0
News Assistant	1.8	66.7
Sports Reporter	56.5	87.5
Photographer	11.0	78.3
Tape Editor	0.9	66.7
Graphics Specialist	8.9	80.0
Internet Specialist	10.0	62.5

The latest numbers return to the general trend of an increasing percentage of newspeople under contract in television. Last year, the numbers were stable or down slightly. This year, almost all categories are up. The biggest jumps were among on-air staff and executive producer. Most people who have contracts have non-compete agreements, but non-competes are not legal in all states.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2003 among all 1,295 operating, nonsatellite television stations and a random sample of 1,482 radio stations. Valid responses came from 838 television stations (64.7 percent) and 133 radio news directors and general managers representing 437 radio stations.

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Radio Newspeople Under Contract and Non-Competes

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	21.1%	55.0%
News Anchor	27.5	36.4
News Reporter	16.7	50.0
News Producer	20.0	66.7
Assignment Editor	25.9	81.0
Sports Anchor	13.0	66.7
Sports Reporter	18.2	100.0

Unlike television, the vast majority of radio newspeople are not under contract, although almost all categories rose noticeably from a year ago. That's the second straight year of across-the-board growth in the use of contracts in radio.