

## News, Staff and Making Money

By Bob Papper and Michael Gerhard

The size of the typical TV newsroom rose to its biggest level ever -- as radio set a new record in the opposite direction.

Almost every category in television news staffing rose in the latest RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey. Part of the reason for the growth appears to be fewer new, small news operations bringing the average down. It will be interesting to see whether those strong employment numbers hold next year, given the tighter economy since the survey data was collected. Compared to 1994, overall TV news full time employment is up 39.1 percent. In the last seven years, network affiliates, overall, have grown 28.9 percent, and other commercial stations have shot up a whopping 157.9 percent. In addition, the number of stations producing local news has risen from 758 in 1996 to 851 this year. Between the growth in the number of stations doing news and the growth of station news departments, total TV news employment (full time and part time) has risen 45 percent in the past 5 years: from 24,180 in 1996 to 35,061 today.

In contrast, in the last seven years, the size of the typical radio newsroom has fallen 56.7 percent, from 4.5 full and part time newspeople in 1994 to 1.95 today.

While the amount of TV news at the typical station has gone up to almost 3 ½ hours per weekday, the amount of radio news on the typical weekday has dropped to just over half an hour.

### Percentage of TV News Departments Providing Content to Other Media

	Another TV Station	Cable TV Channel	Local Radio	Station Website
All TV	19%	17%	40%	68%
Big Four Affiliates	20%	18%	43%	69%
Other Commercial	13%	7%	20%	47%
DMA 1-25	23%	13%	27%	67%
DMA 26-50	11%	15%	31%	62%
DMA 51-100	31%	31%	52%	75%
DMA 101-150	9%	11%	50%	65%
DMA 151+	20%	10%	23%	63%

Overall, news departments are more likely to provide news to other outlets than they were a year ago. All categories were up from a year ago—although news to a cable TV

channel rose only marginally. On a percentage basis, the biggest growth was another TV station, which went from 14 percent last year to 19 percent this time.

#### TV Staff Size

	Average Full-time	Maximum Full-time	Average Part-time	Maximum Part-time	Average Total Staff	Maximum Total Staff
All TV	37.0	141	4.2	39	41.2	160
Big Four Affiliates	38.4	141	4.1	39	42.5	160
Other Commercial	31.2	117	5.9	12	37.1	123
DMA 1-25	77.0	141	8.7	39	85.7	160
DMA 26-50	44.5	90	3.8	8	48.3	95
DMA 51-100	35.1	89	3.4	15	38.5	89
DMA 101-150	24.7	45	3.3	13	28.0	48
DMA 151+	17.8	46	2.8	10	20.6	52

TV news staff size rose to its biggest level ever, with substantial gains in almost every category. Part of the reason for the growth appears to be fewer new, small news operations bringing the average down. Interestingly, while full-time employment is up substantially, part-time employment actually fell slightly.

#### Staff Size Changes (1999-2000)

	Increase	Decrease	Same
All TV News	38%	25%	37%
Big Four Affiliates	37%	26%	37%
Other Commercial	60%	20%	20%

Notice that independent news operations were far more likely to add staff than network affiliates. That may reflect a maturing of many of the newer, independent news operations. Stations with bigger staffs were generally more likely to increase staff than others, but there was no consistent pattern by market size or network affiliation.

#### Amount of News Changes (1999-2000)

	Increase	Decrease	Same
All TV News	40%	5%	55%
Big Four Affiliates	39%	5%	56%
Other Commercial	47%	0	53%
DMA 1-25	30%	7%	63%

DMA 26-50	38%	0	62%
DMA 51-100	54%	4%	42%
DMA 101-150	42%	4%	54%
DMA 151+	27%	7%	66%

While a majority of stations kept the amount of news the same as the year before, a sizeable minority increased news, and few decreased. Note that markets 51-150 were the most likely to increase news. There was no consistent pattern by staff size, geography or network affiliation.

#### Hours of Local TV News per Day

	Average Weekday	Weekday Maximum	Average Saturday	Saturday Maximum	Average Sunday	Sunday Maximum
All TV News	3.42	8.00	1.25	6.50	1.26	6.50
Big Four Affiliates	3.59	8.00	1.35	6.50	1.37	6.50
Other Commercial	2.06	8.00	0.60	1.50	0.60	1.50
DMA 1-25	4.57	8.00	2.02	6.50	2.28	6.50
DMA 26-50	3.69	7.00	1.65	4.50	1.69	4.00
DMA 51-100	3.39	6.00	1.19	5.00	1.13	4.00
DMA 101-150	3.40	8.00	1.07	3.00	1.00	3.00
DMA 151+	2.28	4.00	0.68	1.50	0.65	1.50
Staff 51+	5.16	8.00	2.38	6.50	2.47	6.50
Staff 31-50	3.97	8.00	1.28	3.00	1.21	2.00
Staff 21-30	2.61	5.00	0.90	1.50	0.92	3.00
Staff 11-20	1.94	5.00	0.54	1.50	0.50	1.00
Staff 1-10	1.12	4.00	0.20	2.00	0.30	2.00
ABC	3.57	7.00	1.29	5.50	1.50	5.50
CBS	3.83	8.00	1.29	4.50	1.21	3.00
Fox	2.98	8.00	1.19	3.50	1.37	4.00
NBC	3.74	8.00	1.54	6.50	1.44	6.50
PBS	1.23	5.00	0.22	1.00	0.22	1.00

The average amount of news on weekdays increased by more than half an hour from 1999 to 2000. While almost all categories went up, Fox affiliates rose the most—as many of the newer Fox news operations continued to mature. News on the weekend rose slightly from a year ago.

### TV News Budget ... 2000 vs. 1999

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Don't Know
All TV News	59%	13%	24%	4%
Big Four Affiliates	59%	14%	24%	3%
Other Commercial	67%	7%	20%	6%
DMA 1-25	70%	7%	23%	0
DMA 26-50	69%	8%	15%	8%
DMA 51-100	55%	21%	22%	2%
DMA 101-150	58%	13%	29%	0
DMA 151+	53%	10%	27%	10%

Last year was a good year for news budgets. A majority—sometimes a sizeable one—of almost all categories saw budget increases. The only exceptions were the smallest news operations (staffs with 1-10 people) and PBS affiliates. In both cases, their budgets were most likely to have remained the same as the year before.

### Amount of News Planned ... For 2001 vs. 2000

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not Sure
All TV News	38%	2%	53%	7%
Big Four Affiliates	37%	2%	53%	8%
Other Commercial	40%	0	60%	0
DMA 1-25	37%	0	56%	7%
DMA 26-50	31%	0	69%	0
DMA 51-100	52%	0	46%	2%
DMA 101-150	27%	4%	54%	15%
DMA 151+	37%	3%	50%	10%

A majority of stations in almost all categories expected no change in the amount of news in 2001 compared with 2000. A sizeable minority expected to increase the amount of news, and few expected to cut back.

### TV Stations Using Helicopters and SNG to Gather News

	Own Chopper	Long-term Lease	Hire as Needed	Not Use	Have SNG Truck
All TV News	2%	15%	17%	66%	33%
Big Four Affiliates	2%	16%	19%	63%	34%
Other Commercial	0	13%	13%	74%	27%
DMA 1-25	10%	53%	17%	20%	73%

DMA 26-50	0	31%	15%	54%	62%
DMA 51-100	0	8%	27%	65%	33%
DMA 101-150	0	3%	17%	80%	20%
DMA 151+	0	3%	3%	94%	3%

Outside of large and major markets, helicopter use is pretty limited. Even in markets 26-50, most TV news operations don't use a helicopter at all. Ownership of satellite trucks is widespread in the top 50 markets but falls off precipitously after that.

Almost twice as many stations reported hiring new staff as letting people go, and stations that hired newspeople hired three times as many people as stations that let people go. Interestingly, the list of who was hired and who was let go are remarkably similar.

	Most Often Hired	Most Often Cut
1	Photographer	Reporter
2	Reporter	Producer
3	Producer	Photographer
4	Anchor	Anchor
5	Tape Editor	Tape Editor
6	Web Specialist	Newsroom Assistant (AP)
7	Assignment Editor	Assignment Editor
8	Other	Other

#### TV News Profitability ... 1996 to 2000

	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996
Showing Profit	56%	58%	57%	63%	62%
Breaking Even	13%	11%	9%	11%	6%
Showing Loss	10%	11%	11%	10%	8%
Don't Know	21%	20%	23%	16%	24%

Note that since a drop in profitability in 1998 (when we saw a bunch of new Fox and independent news operations start up or undergo major expansions), there has been little change in news profitability. Before 1996, news directors were not offered the option of "Don't Know." Given the large percentage choosing that option, numbers prior to 1996 are not viewed as comparable (and may not be terribly accurate).

#### TV News Profitability ... by Size and Affiliation

	Showing profit	Breaking even	Showing loss	Don't know
Market size				
1-25	62%	10%	14%	14%

26-50	77%	8%	7%	8%
51-100	69%	10%	8%	13%
101-150	51%	13%	5%	31%
151+	38%	21%	17%	24%
Full-time staff				
51+	73%	14%	5%	8%
31-50	65%	6%	8%	21%
21-30	58%	12%	13%	17%
11-20	36%	8%	12%	44%
1-10	6%	44%	19%	31%
Affiliation				
ABC	56%	24%	3%	17%
CBS	49%	12%	12%	27%
Fox	73%	4%	12%	11%
NBC	68%	4%	9%	19%
Big four affiliates	60%	11%	9%	20%
Other commercial	47%	19%	13%	21%

Overall numbers and market size and staff size breakouts are all fairly similar to last year with a few exceptions. The biggest change is among the very smallest news departments (1-10 staffers), where profitability plunged from last year's 27 percent and break even soared from last year's 7 percent. Among affiliates, ABC and CBS stations dropped from last year, Fox rose substantially, and NBC affiliates remained unchanged. Although well below network affiliates in profitability, other commercial stations rose from last year.

#### Percentage of TV Station Revenue Produced by News

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
All TV News	44.0%	45.5%	5%	65%
Market size				
1-25	38.4%	40%	26%	52%
26-50	34.8%	36%	15%	52%
51-100	47.2%	50%	20%	64%
101-150	43.5%	48%	10%	60%
151+	40.8%	40%	5%	65%
Full-time staff				
51+	43.3%	42.5%	26%	60%
31-50	46.6%	49%	20%	64%
21-30	44.5%	50%	15%	65%
11-20	24.8%	29%	5%	40%
1-10	48.2%	46%	28%	55%
Affiliation				
ABC	50.1%	50%	40%	58%
CBS	42.1%	48%	5%	60%

Fox	36.6%	37.5%	15%	64%
NBC	43.6%	40%	10%	65%
Big four affiliates	43.1%	46%	5%	65%
Other commercial	57.0%	45%	26%	55%

After some slippage last year, the percentage of station revenue produced by news rose again—to its highest level since we started asking the question. Most categories rose—led by strong increases among the smallest news departments, non-network stations and Fox affiliates. CBS and NBC affiliates dropped slightly, and stations with news departments of 11-20 people plunged, but that’s more likely to be a statistical anomaly that’s likely to correct itself next year.

#### Use of Digital Equipment and New Technology in TV News

	Digital field cameras	Digital editing	Digital studio cameras	Digital master control	Digital archive system	Virtual news set	Computer assisted reporting
All TV News	58%	46%	20%	41%	11%	5%	54%
Four network affiliates	59%	42%	21%	40%	13%	5%	58%
Other commercial	73%	73%	27%	53%	20%	0	27%
DMA 1-25	63%	60%	40%	47%	17%	3%	60%
DMA 26-50	54%	62%	19%	46%	8%	8%	69%
DMA 51-100	57%	55%	22%	35%	10%	10%	67%
DMA 101-150	67%	31%	16%	47%	16%	2%	42%
DMA 151+	50%	23%	17%	33%	3%	0	40%

Not surprisingly, stations in the biggest markets were most likely to have digital equipment. Note that these numbers do not indicate what percentage of a station’s gear is digital—only what percentage of stations are using at least some digital gear. Few stations are using a virtual set, but, overall, more than half the stations report doing at least some computer-assisted reporting.

#### Radio Staff Size

	Full time	Part time	Total staff
All radio news	1.35	0.6	1.95
Market			

Major	3.95	1.09	5.04
Large	0.64	0.36	1.00
Medium	0.79	0.57	1.36
Small	0.63	0.26	0.89

The latest figures represent a sizeable drop in radio staffing from last year: down from 2.60 to 1.95. The drop is across all categories and both full time and part time. In 1994, the average radio news operation had 2.4 people full time and 2.1 part time. Seven years later, the total of 4.5 newspeople in 1994 in the typical radio newsroom has fallen 56.7 percent to 1.95. Full-timers are down 43.8 percent and part-timers are down 71.4 percent at the typical radio newsroom.

#### Average Minutes of Locally-Produced Radio News

	All radio	Major market	Large market	Medium market	Small market
Weekdays					
AM drive	16.91	23.67	16.24	14.94	15.67
Midday	5.83	10.85	3.00	5.33	6.32
PM drive	6.49	11.88	3.42	5.63	7.58
Night	2.09	4.61	0.93	1.49	2.07
Total weekday	31.32	51.01	23.59	27.39	31.64
Saturday					
AM drive	6.03	10.97	0.91	5.96	9.7
Midday	2.56	3.64	0.80	3.11	3.30
PM drive	1.67	3.12	0.13	1.53	3.13
Night	1.00	3.88	0.13	0.24	1.20
Total Saturday	11.26	21.61	1.97	10.84	17.33
Sunday					
AM drive	2.37	4.39	1.02	2.46	2.50
Midday	1.81	3.39	0.13	2.07	2.40
PM drive	1.11	2.30	0.13	0.90	2.03
Night	0.72	2.91	0.13	0.38	0.20
Total Sunday	6.01	12.99	1.41	5.81	7.13

Across the board, the amount of radio news is down from last year . Weekday total minutes dropped from 42 in the last survey to 31.32 this time. Saturday fell from 15 to 11.26 and Sunday from 9 to 6.01.

#### Number of Stations Where Radio News Director Oversees the News

One 47%

Two	22%
Three	11%
Four	8%
Five	7%
Six	3%
Seven	1%
Eight	1%

As consolidation in radio continues, the numbers of stations where news is managed by the typical news director continues to grow. Last year, just 3 percent of news directors oversaw five or more stations. This year, the total is 12 percent.

#### What Else Radio News Director Do

Programming	25%
Announcing	23%
Public Affairs	11%
Operations	11%
Sports	9%
Sales	6%
GM	2%
Other	13%

The exact same percentage of news directors as a year ago—64 percent—say they have responsibilities beyond the news. Note that 6 percent (about the same as last year’s 7 percent) say those additional responsibilities include sales.

#### Changes in Radio News, Staff and Budget in the last 12 months

	Increase	Same	Decrease	Note Sure
Total staff	25%	66%	6%	3%
Amount of news	29%	67%	4%	0
Change in news budget	22%	47%	3%	28%
Plan to change amount of news next year	18%	71%	1%	10%

Almost all the stations reporting increases or planned increases were in major markets. Major markets are those with 1 million or more 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.

#### Radio News Profitability ... 1996 to 2000

	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996
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Showing profit	17%	25%	19%	22%	23%
Breaking even	17%	15%	18%	14%	20%
Showing loss	0	7%	6%	6%	6%
Don't know	66%	53%	57%	58%	51%

While the percentage of stations reporting making a profit on news dropped from last year, the biggest change was in the growth of news directors who don't know whether radio news makes a profit for the station. Note that in 1996, when we first offered "Don't know" as an option, just over half the news directors said they didn't know. Five years later, two-thirds say they don't know. That may reflect the relative importance the station puts on local news as part of the overall profit picture.

#### Radio News Profitability by Market Size

	Showing profit	Breaking even	Showing loss	Don't know
Major market	13%	25%	0	62%
Large market	18%	21%	0	61%
Medium market	11%	8%	0	81%
Small market	35%	26%	0	39%

Compared to a year ago, major markets are down in profit but way up in Don't Know. Large markets are up slightly. Medium markets are down, and small markets are about the same.

#### Use of Digital Equipment and New Technology in Radio News

	Digital Audio recording	Digital editing and mixing	Digital or cellular phones	Field laptops for editing
All radio	73%	74%	70%	12%
Major market	71%	79%	71%	29%
Large market	70%	70%	60%	6%
Medium market	79%	85%	75%	7%
Small market	58%	42%	58%	17%

Other than the smallest markets, between two-thirds and three-quarters of radio news departments use digital gear in both the recording and editing of news. Note that these percentages do not indicate what percentage of a station's gear is digital—only what percentage of stations are using at least some digital gear.

## TV and Radio News Directors ... Age, Tenure and Experience

	Average Age	Median Age	Average Years in Current Job	Median Years in Current Job	Average Total Years as ND	Median Total Years as ND
All TV News	40.2	40	3.4	2	5.1	3.5
Big Four Affiliates	39.7	39	3.1	2	4.8	3
Other Commercial	44.0	42	5.7	3.75	6.6	5.25
Market Size						
DMA 1-25	42.6	43	3.8	3	6.2	6
DMA 26-50	43.1	41.5	4.5	2.5	7.4	5
DMA 51-100	39.3	37.5	2.9	2	5.0	3.5
DMA 101-150	39.0	38	3.8	2	5.0	3
DMA 151+	39.5	38	2.5	1.5	3.4	2
All Radio News	40.1	41	5.0	3	10.0	7.5
Market Size						
Major	43.0	43	3.0	3	8.4	8.0
Large	40.9	32	4.4	2.5	15.7	13.5
Medium	38.8	39	5.8	3	8.9	6.5
Small	37.6	36.5	5.2	2.8	7.6	4.0

The median time on the job for TV news directors remains 2 years although the average is higher. The radio median is 3 years. Overall, radio and television news director ages, tenure and experience tend to be fairly close. Generally, in both radio and television, larger markets have slightly older news directors, and news directors in the larger two market sizes in both radio and TV have more overall experience as news director than in smaller markets.

*Bob Papper is professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Michael Gerhard, Ph.D., is associate professor of telecommunications at Ball State and has extensive industry and research*

*experience. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio Television News Directors Association.*

### **About the Survey**

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2000 among all 1,387 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,193 radio stations. Valid responses came from 731 television stations (52.7 percent) and 120 radio news directors and general managers representing 278 radio stations.