

2019 RTDNA/Hofstra University Newsroom Survey

Local News Numbers

An introductory note, if you will. 2019 marks my 25th year conducting the RTDNA (before that, RTNDA) Annual Survey. First at Ball State University and now at Hofstra University. It has been my privilege to do this, and I want to thank RTDNA, Ball State and Hofstra for the support and opportunity to keep this going. Most of all, I want to thank all of you who spend what I know is way too much time poring over the way too many questions that I ask on this survey. Thank you.
- Bob Papper

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

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey found that, overall, 68.6% of all radio stations in the survey report running local news: 73.2% of AM stations and 66.9% of FM stations. That's almost identical to a year ago.

In the radio survey, 75.1% of radio news directors and general managers say their station or station group is locally owned. That's down 4 points from a year ago.

Average and median minutes of locally-produced radio news – 2019

	Weekday average	Weekday median	Saturday average	Saturday median	Sunday average	Sunday median
All radio	80.3	49	29.5	0	23.6	0
Major market	146.4	60	70.3	0	64.7	0
Large market	61.9	36	11.6	0	12.8	0
Medium market	68.6	48	21.8	0	16.2	0
Small market	67.3	50	25.9	2	15.5	0
Commercial	87.2	55	38.1	0	30.6	0
Non-commercial	64.1	35	9.2	0	7.3	0

Average number of weekday minutes of news went up overall (by 9 minutes), with major markets and small markets going up, large markets going down and medium markets staying the same. Median – or typical – numbers give a more accurate picture. There we see major and medium markets close to the same; large markets down and small markets up. Both commercial and non-commercial stations went up in amount of news, but commercial stations went up more.

The bigger the staff, the more news a station runs, and there were no exceptions to that straight line. The number of stations in a local group made no consistent difference, although single stations ran less news than two or more stations in a cluster. Stations in the Northeast ran more news than the other areas, and stations in the South ran less, overall.

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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 (2018)	22.1%	5.4%	71.8%	0.7%
Plan to change amount of news next year (2019)	18.7	0.5	73.5	7.3

The percentage of stations that increased the amount of local news edged up slightly; the percentage that cut back held steady; and the percentage that stayed the same edged down a bit. None of the changes was substantial. Non-commercial stations were more than twice as likely to increase news as commercial stations: 38.6% versus 15.1%. Generally, the bigger the news staff, the more likely that the station increased the amount of local news. 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. Projected news for this year is up about 3 points from a year ago. Non-commercial news directors are three times as likely to expect to increase local news as commercial news directors. They always say that, but they're also (almost) always right. Generally, large and major market stations are more likely than smaller ones to expect news growth, and the smallest markets trail all the others. Stations in the Northeast were much less likely to expect to expand the amount of news this year.

Changes in radio newscasts in the past year

	Added a newscast	Cut a newscast	Both added and cut	No change
All radio news	15.1%	9.5%	3.6%	71.8%
Major market	20.3	7.2	2.9	69.6
Large market	18.6	12.9	1.4	67.1
Medium market	13.1	11.7	4.4	70.8
Small market	12.3	6.1	4.4	77.2
Commercial	11.1	9.6	3.7	75.6
Non-commercial	24.2	9.2	3.3	63.3

The numbers aren't dramatically different from a year ago, although non-commercial stations were more than twice as likely to have added a newscast as commercial stations. That was true last year, too, but not by as much as this time around.

Usually, newscast additions tend to favor one time period more than another, but that wasn't the case this year. Additions in afternoon drive, 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. just barely edged out morning drive, 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. and midday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Evening, 7 p.m. to midnight, lagged behind, and nobody mentioned graveyard, midnight to 5 a.m.

Newscast cuts were fairly evenly divided between afternoon drive and morning drive, but more stations mentioned cutting the length of all newscasts or making cuts all day long.

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.

Bob Papper is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Journalism at Hofstra University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. This research was supported by the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication at Hofstra University and the Radio Television Digital News Association.

About the Survey

The RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2018 among all 1,685 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,481 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,310 television stations (77.7%) and 645 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,938 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.