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

What's New Online in 2019 for TV
by Bob Papper

Once again, I received well over 200 responses to the question, "What's the most important new thing the station is doing online?"

All told, 74.2% of news directors said they were doing something new in digital. That number has been little changed in the last three years.

Most of the answers, 57.6%, talked about a plan of some sort. That might be establishing goals for people for posting or a minimum number of Facebook Lives or other streaming per day or per week. The streaming might involve weather or sports or politics or breaking news or newscasts or specific geographic coverage or even a Telemundo channel. There were plans that included or specified OTT, Alexa updates, Roku, Google Home and more. There were plenty of mentions of digital first and digital only. Staffing, staff reorganization and staff re-thinking all came up.

Content came in at 37.8%. I labeled one of the sub-categories "more" because it involved more video (#1), more content (#2), more push alerts (#3), more Instagram (#4), more apps (#5), more long-form, long-term or investigative (#5), tied with more podcasts (#5). Then it was scattered things like slideshows, Crowd Tangle, Facebook, etc.

Technical, at 4.6%, filled in the rest. That included new and redesigned websites and getting videos to run faster.

Most news directors gave short lists, but a few made longer, more detailed comments:

- Establish analytics understanding with the team, determine goals for presence & engagement, create competitive environment for team members to share content on all platforms, hiring digital team and developing new strategy

- Instituted a bi-weekly meeting of all staff to pitch digital story ideas with local flair and content. These stories are then worked on by the author in conjunction with their normal daily duties. Because they are pitching stories which interest them, they are engaged and happy to write them. These are some of the best and most shared articles on our website.

- Now in the process of combining Assignment Desk with Digital Team

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- Requiring newscast producers to write digital first -- before writing TV scripts in rundowns

- Specifically assigned expectations/duties to each staff member. This is NOT just a digital staff responsibility.

- We redesigned the newsroom to put the entire digital team in the center of the newsroom, including the producer, editor & director for the new 9pm digital newscast. This also includes a digital set, located in the newsroom. Additionally, we reformatted our morning editorial meetings to start with a discussion of digital content - what's trending, key stories that continue to have legs - to help inform our decisions for that day and plan for the future

The biggest markets, 1 to 25, and the biggest newsrooms, 51+, were most likely to have done something new, but after that, there were no patterns at all.

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

I didn't ask whether a TV station has a website this year because it has been 8 years since the last time a TV station that runs local news didn't have one.

I've also stopped asking whether a station had certain elements online like video, stills, calendars, etc. As websites matured, changes had become few and mostly inconsequential. So last year, I just asked if stations had "added or eliminated anything meaningful" from the station website. Just over 85% said no. This year, the no group is down to 74.6%.

So what did the 25% add or cut?

First, a stipulation. Little of what was new was new to local TV news websites; they were new to that station's website.

Most often noted, at 29.4%, were specialized pages or sections of the website. A Verify section (Tegna station); investigative or long form section; politics or election; a site for people new to the community; water quality crisis; special weekend section; comments from viewers; good news section; raw interviews; sports; user-friendly databases; polls.

Just behind, at 25.7%, came more, better, more focused, more video, more local news … just more and/or better.

A tie at 16.2%: approach and technical. Approach included things like more digital first stories, new or more livestreams, Infogram stories. Technical included a new website – new, upgraded, improved, more user-friendly, revamped and things like drop-down menus.

At 9.5% came staffing issues: more, new, reorganized.

And, finally, podcasts at 4.1%

The larger the market, the more likely that the station website was doing something it hadn't done before. No other sub-group made any consistent difference.

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Percentage of web content that's only on the web - 2019

All TV	24.9%
Markets 1-25	27.9
Markets 26-50	25.7
Markets 51-100	25.9
Markets 101-150	23.5
Markets 151+	22.7
Staff size	
51+	25.6
31 - 50	25.1
21 - 30	21.7
11 - 20	20.9
1 - 10	31.4

Web content that's only on the web rose by just three-tenths of a point compared to a year ago. The numbers are surprisingly uniform across all subgroups.

Percentage of web content that's user-generated - 2019

All TV	11.5%
Markets 1-25	15
Markets 26-50	9.8
Markets 51-100	12
Markets 101-150	8.1
Markets 151+	13.3
Staff size	
51+	13.5
31 - 50	11.3
21 - 30	10.8
11 - 20	7.8
1 - 10	15.5

User-generated content on the web rose by just over 2 points from last year. Every market size went up, and most staff sizes did, too.

Web traffic

TV station website traffic during the past 30 days - 2019

	Page Views (in thousands)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All TV	5,117.4	1,332.2
Market Size		
1-25	13,378.9	3,267.8
26-50	6,407.9	1,737.4
51-100	4,746.6	1,311.4
101-150	2,416.4	490.8
151+	2,491.6	463.2

Page views are down a bit from last year although unique visitors are virtually identical to a year ago. That follows last year's big jump from the year before. More news directors knew the

numbers this year. Last year, almost half, 49.2% said they didn't know. This year, that number dropped to 42%.

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 articles.

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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.