

Business of News

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

Local TV News Employment Gains ... Near All-Time High by Bob Papper

The latest RTDNA/Hofstra University Survey shows total local TV news employment rose by 2.6% over the last year. That's a gain of 700 jobs – erasing the 500 lost a year ago and adding 200 more. At 27,800, local TV news has reached the second highest total full-time employment ever – just 100 below the all-time peak in 2009.

Historically, I've always compared TV employment with newspaper employment as compiled by the American Society of News Editors. But, as some of you may be aware, ASNE changed all of that in 2016. It now compiles diversity numbers in a completely different way (thus eliminating comparisons with TV), and it has stopped, altogether, calculating total newspaper employment. Based on estimates from newspaper consultant and Newsonomics founder Ken Doctor, I put total daily newspaper newsroom employment at about three to four thousand below total full-time local TV news employment.

TV staff size – 2019

	Average full-time	Median full-time	Max full-time	Average part-time	Median part-time	Max part-time	Average total staff	Median total staff	Max total staff
All TV	40.5	35	148	3.4	2	30	44.5	38.5	154
Big four affiliates	41.5	36.5	131	3.4	2	30	45.6	41	132
Other commercial	38.6	30	148	4.5	2	22	44.8	37	154
Non-commercial	12	8	35	2.5	0.5	8	14.5	8.5	43
Market size:									
1-25	68.7	76	148	8	6	30	76.7	85	154
26-50	66	70	97	4.6	3	17	69.7	70	108
51-100	42.7	43	110	2.7	2	15	45.8	45	118
101-150	30.6	30.5	56	3	1	17	34.1	32.5	64
151+	19.6	20	44	1.9	1	16	21.8	21	59

Overall average and median full-time newsroom employment is up versus a year ago – but that's no thanks to top 25 markets. They dropped in both average and median, while almost all other markets were up in either average or median or both. Markets 51 to 100 were virtually unchanged. Interestingly, the average number of part-timers went down overall, but the

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decrease was not across the board. Top 25 markets actually went up in part-timers, but all other groups went down. The median number of part-timers remained the same overall, but it, too, went up in top 25 markets -- and only top 25 markets.

TV staff size changes ... the past year (2018)

	Increase	Decrease	Same
All TV news	30.3%	19.7%	50%
Big four affiliates	28.3	20.5	51.2
Other commercial	54.2	12.5	33.3

Exactly half of all stations reported no changes in staff size, but the group that increased fell by 3 percentage points from a year ago. The biggest change came from other commercial stations – which jumped 11 points in the increased staff size category. Top 25 markets were most likely to see growth, and markets 100+ were least likely. Fox affiliates led all others, and stations in the Midwest were least likely to see more staff.

TV planned staff changes ... the next year (2019)

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV news	29.1%	3.8%	55.5%	11.6%
Big four affiliates	25.8	4.2	58.8	11.2
Other commercial	62.5	0	25	12.5

This table has historically been a pretty good predictor of the year to come. It came very close predicting the staff increases this year, but it was 15 points low on the down side. Projections for 2019 are similar to a year ago – except for other commercial. The percentage of news directors at the stations predicting staffing increases is almost triple the percentage a year ago. We'll have to watch how that comes out next year. News directors in the Midwest lagged well behind all other areas in predicting staff increases. There were no big differences in those predicting staff decreases, although news directors in the biggest newsrooms were more likely to expect staff cuts than any other group.

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.