



TV and radio news directors profiles: Age accelerates

By Bob Papper and Keren Henderson

Sept. 3, 2024 – The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that TV news directors did not age in 2023. For the second year in a row, that has happened – although it did not feel that way. Especially as the median length of stay for a TV news director dropped for the first time in 30 years. Radio news directors aged more rapidly.

PAY GAPS AND SHIFTING AGES

- A quarter of radio news stations lack a full-time news director, and gender pay disparities persist, with men generally earning more than women in major markets
- TV news directors' median age remain unchanged at 50 in 2023
- The average tenure for TV news directors dropped from three to two years, ending a 30-year trend
- Radio news directors' median age increased to 54, with commercial station directors older than those at public stations

NEWS DIRECTORS



TV

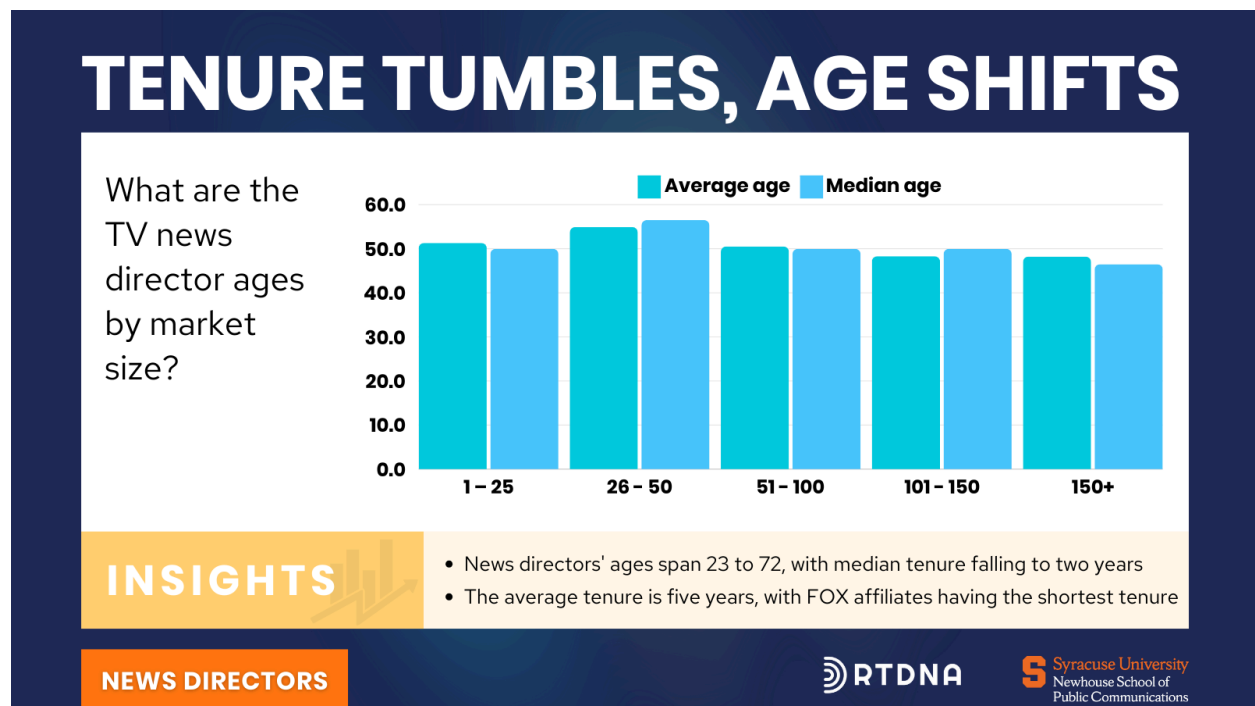
The typical (median) TV news director remains 50 years old this year. That's identical to last year and the year before. However, the average age rose a year from 49 to 50.

There is no correlation between age and market size or staff size.

News directors in the Northeast are a little older (average 53) than the rest. There are no other geographic distinctions – and Northeast news directors are only three to four years older than the others.

TV news director age by market size - 2024

Market size	Average age	Median age
1 - 25	51.3	50
26 - 50	54.9	56.5
51 - 100	50.5	50
101 - 150	48.3	50
150+	48.2	46.5



The overall age spans 23 to 72. That’s identical to a year ago on the young side, but seven years younger on the older side.

The average tenure of a TV news director at their station is five years. The median tenure has decreased from three years to two years. For the first time in 30 years, the median tenure for a news director is no longer three years.

There has been no consistent relationship between market size and the length of time a person serves as a news director. Last year, the top 25 markets had the longest median news director tenure at four years, but it dropped to two years this year. This matched the tenure in markets 51 to 100 and 101 to 150. News directors in markets 26 to 50 now have the highest median tenure at 3.5 years, while those in markets ranked 151 and above have a median tenure of 2.5 years.

FOX affiliates, again, have the shortest average tenure, with PBS, "other commercial" and CBS affiliates at the high end (in the six-to-seven-year range).

The average news director has been in that position somewhere or other for 9.7 years; the median is seven.

More than half (57.4%) of TV news directors serve as news directors at the only newsrooms they have ever led. That number is almost identical to a year ago.

Male news directors remain older than female news directors. Both the average and median difference came in four years apart.

No noticeable discrimination in TV news

We are asked periodically about salary comparisons on TV between men and women or based on ethnicity. The only position we can judge is the news director because, for most news directors, we have gender and ethnicity and enough salary data to make a comparison.

The short answer is that there is no evidence of salary discrimination directed at women or minority TV news directors. Women news directors come in with higher average salaries compared to men with a median almost identical. Non-white news directors come in higher in salary compared to white news directors. For both men/women and white/non-white, the differences are negligible across market sizes. That does not mean there is no discrimination, but for at least that one position, it does not show up in salary.

Radio news director profile

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that radio news directors aged two years in the last year.

Radio age

It was a tougher year in radio. The average age went from 50.2 last year to 51.9 this time around. The median age jumped from 52 last year to 54. Makes up for last year's age stagnation.

Commercial station news directors continue to be older than those at public stations. The gap decreased from seven years in the 2022 survey to six last year and now to nearly five. The median commercial radio news director is 55, while the median non-commercial news director is 50. There are no consistent relationships between age and market size or staff size. Radio news director ages range from 19 to 85. Last year, the oldest radio news director was just 80.

Radio news directors have been on the job as news director for an average of 11.5 years, but with a median tenure of seven. Both numbers have increased compared to last year – the average is up by 1.5 and the median by two.

One news director has been at the same station for 50 years, and a handful are in the 40s. The smaller the market, the more likely that the news director has been there for a longer period. Non-commercial news directors have been at their stations three to four years less than their commercial counterparts, but no other grouping showed any consistent variability.

And news director experience wasn't just at that station. The average radio news director has been a news director somewhere for 16.1 years; the median is 12. The average is up just over a year compared to last year, and the median is up by two. News directors at commercial stations averaged approximately six years more experience than non-commercial news directors; the median difference remains at nine. There were not a lot of differences based on other criteria.

Is there a radio news director at all? And is he or she full-time?

More than a quarter (28.2%) of all the radio stations that run local news do not have a news director. That is down three points from a year ago, and it breaks down to 29% of commercial stations and 25.7% of non-commercial stations. Commercial stations are down five points, but non-commercial stations are up by two. Percentages fell as staff size increased, but market size made little difference. For whatever reason, stations in the Midwest are a lot more likely to have a news director than stations everywhere else.

Over 15% of radio news directors are not full-time station employees. That is up a bit from last year. Last year, there was no difference between commercial and non-commercial stations. Not this year, with commercial stations 5% more likely to have a part-time news director. The bigger the market, the less likely that the news director is part time.

Radio news directors ... and how news fits into their job

Part time also applies to news director responsibilities as well. A quarter (25.4%) of radio news directors say that news is not their primary responsibility. That's almost identical to last year. Commercial stations have a much higher percentage of news directors whose primary responsibility is not news compared to non-commercial stations, with 31.1% of news directors at commercial stations reporting this, versus 8.6% at non-commercial stations.

So, if news isn't the news director's primary job, then what is?

37.5%	General manager, operations manager, station manager, owner (+11)
20.8	Program Director/programming (+3)
12.5	Sports (+5)
10.4	DJ (-18)
10.4	Sales (+8)
4.2	Web (+0.5)
4.2	Other (0)

For news directors whose primary responsibility is news, we asked what other roles they had at the station. The list is practically endless:

17%	Sports (+4.5)
13.7	Administration, management (-15)
13.1	Sales, fundraising (+12)
11.1	Web (-0.7)
11.1	Programming, program director ... included with admin. last year
7.2	Production (+0.5)
5.2	DJ (-16)
5.2	Everything (+100)
3.9	Public affairs (-3)
3.3	Talk show (+1)
3.3	Engineering (+3)
2.6	Accounting ... new
2	Community affairs ... new
1.3	Board op ... new as separate

Some salary disparities in radio news

The comparisons are not as clean in radio as they are in TV. We do not have enough salaries from non-white radio news directors to compare, but we have enough to compare men and women. Overall, men have a slightly higher average salary than women, but women have a higher median salary than men.

But when we look at market and staff size, there are suggestions for a problem. The numbers are small, so we cannot be certain, but in major markets, men make more than \$30,000 more per year than women. The median difference is also \$30,000. At the largest newsrooms, 10 or more news employees, men make an average of \$20,000 more than women and a median of \$7,000 more.

Just to clarify, the numbers are too small to definitively determine the differences, but it's worth monitoring.

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About the Survey

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2023 among all 1,876 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 4,764 radio stations. The television response rate is different for every question, but Valid responses came from as many as 1,387 television stations (73.9%) and 631 radio news directors and general managers representing 1,902 radio stations. Some data sets (e.g. the number of TV stations originating local news, getting news from others and women TV news directors) are based on a complete census and are not projected from a smaller sample.