



Fewer radio stations run less local news

By Bob Papper and Keren Henderson

July 8, 2024 – The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that, overall, 64.2% of all radio stations in the Survey report running local news: 66.5% of AM stations and 63.3% of FM stations. Those numbers are all down from last year – down 4 points overall from a year ago. FM stations dropped 3 points, but AM stations fell by almost 7.

Overall, 65% of commercial stations run local news in this year's Survey. That's nearly identical to last year's 66.2%. A year ago, we saw a 10-point drop in non-commercial stations running local news. This year, the percentage of non-commercial stations running local news fell another 2 points – down to 60.7%. We don't know why there's been a drop in local news at non-commercial stations. This year's numbers back up the idea that last year's drop was neither a fluke nor a survey anomaly.

There's a common perception that locally owned radio stations are more likely to produce local news than stations that are not locally owned. But that's never been the case every time we've looked at the issue – until this year. Overall, 75.3% of locally owned station groups run local news, and 71.5% of non-locally owned station groups run local news. The percentage of locally owned groups running local news is virtually unchanged from last year, but non-locally owned station groups fell 12 points from a year ago.

If we look at individual stations, the difference is even sharper. Overall, 68.4% of locally owned stations run local news versus 54.1% of non-locally owned stations.

HOW MUCH LOCAL NEWS IS ON THE RADIO?

- 64.2% of radio stations report local news, AM 66.5%, FM 63.3%. 65% of commercial stations air local news, almost the same as last year.
- 75.3% of locally owned station groups run local news this year. 71.5% of non-locally owned groups run local news this year.

Radio News

RTDNA

Syracuse University
Newhouse School of
Public Communications

Average and median minutes of locally produced radio news – 2024

	Weekday average	Weekday median	Saturday average	Saturday median	Sunday average	Sunday median
All Radio	82.1	40	27.4	0	23.5	0
Market size:						
Major market	180.8	50	72.4	0	72.6	0
Large market	75.8	33	32.3	0	27.8	0
Medium market	75.2	40	17.1	0	14.6	0
Small market	61.8	40	22.2	5	15.8	0
Commercial	81.8	40.5	31.1	0	26.6	0
Non-commercial	83.2	35	16.1	0	13.9	0

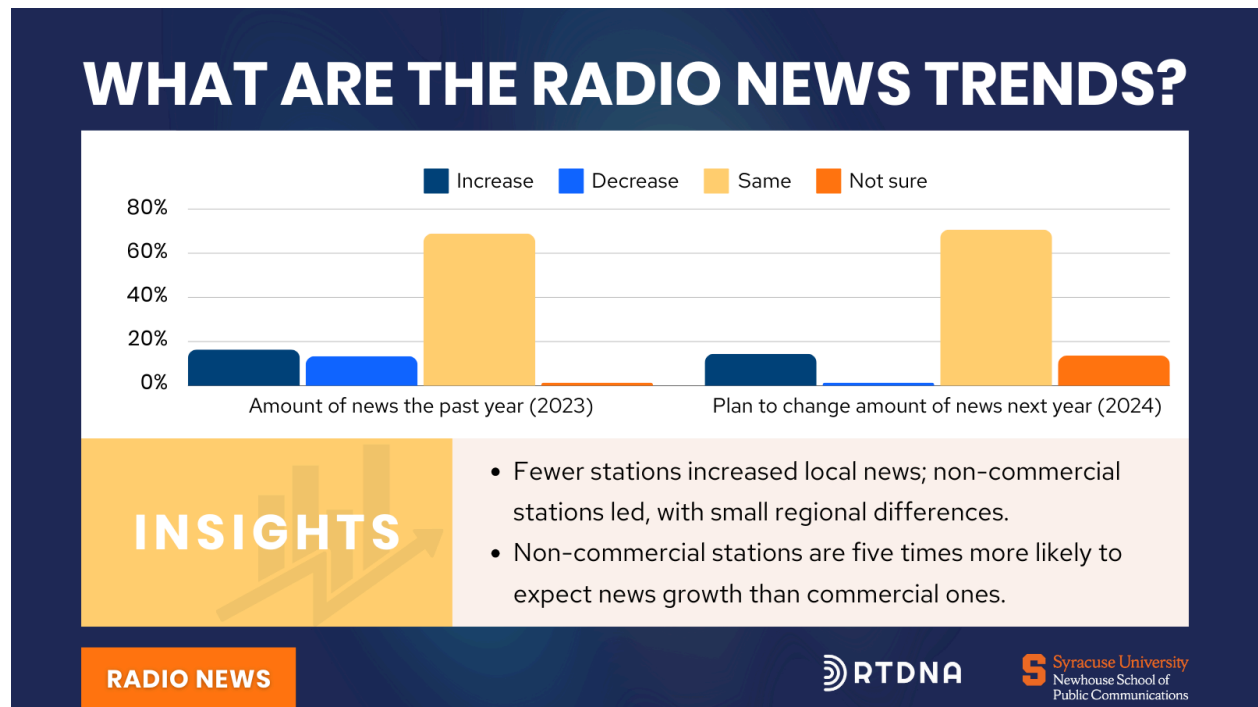
Overall, the typical (median) amount of weekday local news dropped by 8 minutes. Last year, minutes increased by 3 per weekday. The average fell by over 20 – back to just about where it was two years ago. The biggest drop in average minutes came in large markets, suggesting that fewer all news or news/talk stations there filled out the Survey this year. Medium markets are down a bit; small markets dropped an average of over 20 minutes per weekday.

Commercial station minutes decreased on average, while non-commercial stations saw an increase in average minutes but a slight drop in median minutes.

Meanwhile, average minutes decreased across the board on the weekends, with the typical station not running local news at all on the weekend – except 5 minutes on Saturdays in small markets.

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 (2023)	16.4%	13.4%	68.9%	1.4%
Plan to change amount of news next year (2024)	14.4	1.4	70.7	13.6



The percentage of stations that increased the amount of local news fell again, this time by about 3 points compared to a year ago. The percentage decreasing local news went up by nearly 8 points. As usual, the bigger the staff, the more likely that local news content increased. Historically, the bigger the market, the more likely an increase in the amount of news. Yet, for the third consecutive year, this was not the case, although the largest markets were the most inclined to boost local news. Non-commercial stations are still much more likely to increase the amount of local news compared to commercial ones (30.9% vs. 11.2%). Regional differences are modest this last year. News coverage saw a higher growth rate in stations in the Northeast, while stations in the West experienced the lowest increase.

There's little change in the overall percentage expecting to increase local news this year. News directors and general managers at non-commercial stations are almost five times more likely to expect news growth compared to commercial stations. Managers in the smallest markets are

less likely to expect to increase the amount of news; large market managers are most likely to expect to add more local news.

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.

About the Author

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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.