



## More Radio Stations Run More Local News

By Bob Papper and Keren Henderson

JULY 19, 2023 – The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that, overall, 68.3% of all radio stations in the Survey report running local news: 73% of AM stations and 66.6% of FM stations. The overall percentage running news is up 3 points from a year ago, with AM up more than 5 points and FM up by 2. That kind of one-year increase suggests that stations that stopped local news because of COVID may well have brought local news back.

There has been a significant swing in the percentages of commercial versus non-commercial stations that run local news. This year, we see a 10 point drop in the percentage of non-commercial stations running local news – down from 72.5% a year ago to 62.7% this time around. Commercial stations, by contrast, edged up a couple points to 66.2%. The drop in non-commercial stations is surprising, and we have no good explanation for it. It’s possible that the difference is that more non-commercial stations are reporting on their digital subchannels which tend to run classical music or jazz – and not news.

There is 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, and it’s not the case this year, either. Overall, 74.9% of locally owned stations run local news, but 83.9% of non-locally owned stations run local news. That’s down slightly among locally owned stations, and up about 7 points for stations with non-local ownership.

### Average and median minutes of locally produced radio news

	Weekday average	Weekday median	Saturday average	Saturday median	Sunday average	Sunday median
All Radio	108.8	48	33.9	0	29.2	0
Market size:						
Major market	165.1	54.5	77.6	0	82	0
Large market	169	46	38.9	0	33.6	0
Medium market	82.9	49	21.1	0	15.3	0
Small market	84.6	44.5	30	0	23.8	0
Commercial	123.5	52	39.6	0	33.7	0
Non-commercial	68.6	38	18.4	0	17.2	0

Overall, the typical (median) number of weekday minutes of local news increased by 3 minutes per day. But the average tells a different story – an increase of 21.2 minutes which means that some stations had bigger jumps than others. Indeed, when you look at market size, some of that difference is accounted for: major and large market averages soared by 33.5 and 93.1 minutes respectively, while medium markets only increased their weekday minutes by an average of 8 and small market minutes fell by an average of 7.5. Similarly, the median number of weekday minutes increased in every market size but in small markets where the minutes dropped by 5.5.

Overall average weekday minutes in commercial radio increased by 29.9 while non-commercial fell by 3.8. Similarly, typical (median) minutes increased by 7 for commercial radio but fell by 4 for non-commercial stations.

Meanwhile average minutes increased across the board on the weekends, but with the typical station not running local news at all on the weekend.

**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 (2022)	19.5%	5.9%	73.9%	0.6%
Plan to change amount of news next year (2023)	15.7	1	72.5	10.7

The percentage of stations that increased the amount of local news fell again, this time by 1.8 points compared to a year ago. The percentage decreasing local news also fell – here by 2.1. As usual, the bigger the staff, the more likely that local news content increased. Usually, the bigger the market, the more likely an increase in the amount of news, but that wasn’t true for the second year in a row. Large and small markets were the least likely to increase news.

Non-commercial stations were still much more likely to increase the amount of local news (28.1% vs. 16.4%) compared to commercial ones, but while commercial numbers held steady, non-commercial fell for the second year in a row here as well. Regional differences were minor last year – this year it looks like stations in the West were most likely to increase news production by at least 5 points ahead of the other regions.

There’s a 4.6-point drop in the overall percentage expecting to increase news this next year. Non-commercial news directors and general managers are three times more likely to expect to increase news than commercial stations. Managers in the smallest markets are less likely to expect to increase the amount of news; major markets are three times as likely as the small ones to expect to do so.

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.

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***This research was supported by the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and the Radio Television Digital News Association.***

### **About the Survey**

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2022 among all 1,812 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 4,819 radio stations. Valid responses came from as many as 1,365 television stations (75.3%) and 777 radio news directors and general managers representing 2,514 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.