



TV news directors boost digital initiatives

By Bob Papper and Keren Henderson

Aug. 8, 2024 – More than three-quarters (78.3%) of TV news directors say they're doing something new and important digitally in the latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey.

That's up three points from a year ago and plus 10 points from 2022. Stations in bigger markets with more staff are more likely to innovate digitally, but that is not completely true this year. Market size makes no meaningful difference with every group coming in between 72% and 85%. Staff size makes a difference, with stations with 21 or more staffers much higher than smaller newsrooms. FOX affiliates lag well behind other groups.

TV NEWS DIRECTORS INNOVATE DIGITALLY

- More than three-quarters of TV news directors are innovating digitally.
- This is up three points from last year and 10 points from 2022.
- Staff size impacts innovation, with larger teams being more innovative, while FOX affiliates lag behind.
- Most responses, 46%, focus on content, including more video and new podcasts.

TV ONLINE



It's difficult to categorize responses to questions like this, but it's important to learn something valuable from a variety of answers. We're searching for something about trends and emphasis.

The answers break down into three fairly distinct areas. Most commonly, at 46%, answers relate to content: more content, more video, new podcasts and some other areas. Here's some of what's included in that group in their own words:

- Adding more video to our stories
- Daily "fastcast" is attached to any web story without video so we can get our video views and ad revenue up – been a big success in 2023
- Increased number of streaming news and non-news programs we produce
- Making video and pictures part of every story possible
- We started more digital only content. mini-series and newscasts that air only online

Thirty percent of the responses relate to streaming, OTT, FAST channels and YouTube. Note that FAST channel is short of free ad-supported TV:

- Adding 24/7 weather stream; added YouTube channel
- Finally made a dedicated YouTube page for our videos (please don't laugh – who knew about this newfangled YouTube website?!?). We also have been really throwing a lot of resources at our digital apps on Apple TV, Roku and [Amazon] Fire Stick
- Started a digital news desk which does streaming news segments when we are not in regularly scheduled newscasts
- We are on YouTube and pushing more viewers to content there

At 24%, there are answers related to organization, coordination, staffing and metrics:

- Bringing broadcast and digital together
- Changing focus to emphasize positivity on digital platforms
- Consistently posting content by key times throughout the day. Also, increasing engagement on Instagram
- Launched paid subscription product for high school sports
- Make sure everyone in the news department contributes daily
- More local content by producers and not reporters
- Redesigned website, increased presence on Instagram, hired consultant to help us optimize web content

- Shifted resources from TV to digital. Shifted personnel from TV to digital special projects, digital video production, newsletters, digital arts coverage, digital investigative journalism
- Specializing content to match each platform not just putting the same thing everywhere
- The entire newsroom is now responsible for our digital success, not just our digital team. We all contribute to our digital platforms
- We've come up with goals and benchmarks to meet. We've also designed digital only series to move audience engagement. We are also looking at analytics more to see where we can improve, along with making sure we have improved SEO [search engine optimization] and keywords and tags in our posted stories online

Some lines between one choice and another are blurry, but we have to draw the lines somewhere or else it runs the risk of being a jumble of random responses.

Web traffic

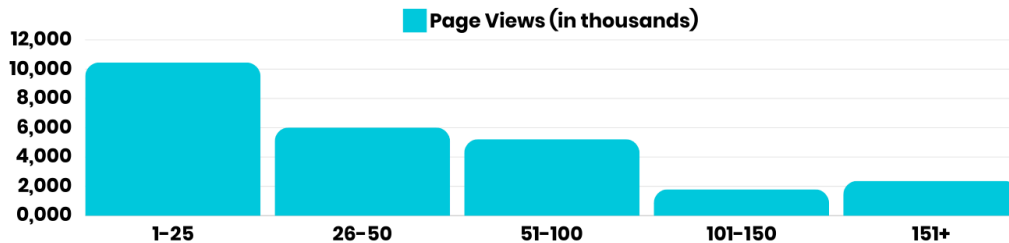
TV station website traffic during the past 30 days – 2024

	Page Views (in thousands)	Unique Visitors (in thousands)
All TV	4,711	1,173
Market Size		
1-25	10,457	2,584
26-50	6,017	1,666
51-100	5,218	1,054
101-150	1,800	815
151+	2,370	400

Overall, website traffic is down from a year ago. Page views dropped 15% and unique visitors dropped 31%. Page views are up in markets 1 to 25, and unique visitors are up in markets 101 to 150, but all other groupings are down.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC IS DOWN FROM 2023

What was the TV station website traffic during the past 30 days – 2024?



INSIGHTS

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RTDNA

Syracuse University
Newhouse School of
Public Communications

Podcasts

Podcasts continue to be big news in media trade journals, but they're still not getting much love and attention at TV stations. Still, on average, every market and staff size edged up from a year ago except the smallest staff (1 to 10 news people), but the median (typical) number of podcasts at a TV station remains at zero – the same as it's been.

How many different podcasts do you run per week?

	Average Number	Median Number
All TV	0.8	0
Market Size		
1-25	1.8	0
26-50	1.1	0
51-100	1	0
101-150	0.5	0
151+	0.1	0
Staff Size		
51+	1.1	0
31-50	0.5	0
21-30	0.2	0
11-20	0.1	0
1-10	0	0

Note that the median number of podcasts – zero – remains true for every subgroup of TV stations, including network affiliation and geography. Overall, 85.8% of TV stations report running the same number of podcasts as last year (which was mostly zero); 12.1% say they're running more podcasts than a year ago; zero say they're running fewer.

Web staffing numbers are included in the staffing article. Web profitability is discussed in the business of news articles. Apps are in the social media article.

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

About the Authors

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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.