



Radio Staffing Just a Bit Smaller

By Bob Papper with Keren Henderson

June 16, 2022 – The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey shows the typical (median) radio news operation had a full-time news staff of one – the same as it’s been since these surveys started 28 years ago.

But there has been slippage in total radio news staffing in the last year. It’s not a lot, but the average radio news operation dropped from 3.2 full-timers to 3; part time edged down a tenth. The slippage is across the board but appears to have hit non-commercial radio just a bit harder, with the average non-commercial radio news operation going from 6.7 full time to 5.9 and part time dropping from 2.4 to 1.8.

The use of a centralized newsroom by multi-station groups dropped as well. All told, two-thirds (66.6%) of all multi-station local groups operate with a centralized newsroom, but that’s down a surprising 10 points from last year.

Radio staff size - 2022

| | 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 Radio | 3 | 1 | 67 | 1.6 | 1 | 24 | 4.6 | 3 | 68 |
| Market size: | | | | | | | | | |
| Major | 8.4 | 3 | 65 | 2.1 | 1 | 20 | 10.8 | 6.5 | 68 |
| Large | 4.4 | 3 | 67 | 1.8 | 1 | 16 | 6.2 | 4 | 68 |
| Medium | 1.9 | 1 | 19 | 1.6 | 1 | 24 | 3.5 | 2 | 25 |
| Small | 1.6 | 1 | 14 | 1.3 | 1 | 15 | 2.8 | 2 | 15 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Commercial | 1.8 | 1 | 16 | 1.5 | 1 | 24 | 3.4 | 2 | 25 |
| Non-comm | 5.9 | 3 | 67 | 1.8 | 1 | 16 | 7.7 | 5 | 68 |

All market sizes except large ones dropped in staff size. Not by a lot, but they didn’t start with a lot either. The average staff size edged down 0.2 people and major markets took the biggest hit.

This survey breaks down radio numbers in a variety of ways, but the sharpest, overall contrast in radio news is between commercial and non-commercial stations. And the differences have become sharper and deeper year after year, with non-commercial stations growing much larger and faster than commercial stations. This year, commercial radio station staff went down, on average, by 0.2, but non-commercial station staff fell by 0.8. Note that non-commercial stations are more likely to be found in large and major markets.

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the news staff is likely to be.

Changes in radio staff in the last 12 months (2021) and planned for the future – 2022

| | Increase | Decrease | Same | Not sure |
|---|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| Total news staff the past year (2021) | 14.4% | 13.9% | 70.8% | 1% |
| Plan to change amount of staff next year (2022) | 21.5 | 0.5 | 66.7 | 11.2 |

The percentage of stations saying they increased staff rose by 4 points – the same amount the percentage decreasing staff went down. It’s hard to reconcile that with the overall drop in radio staff, but, for whatever reason, this year saw an increase in the number of small-market stations that filled out the survey and a drop in major market responses. Major market stations were four times more likely to increase staff than the smallest market stations (although they were also twice as likely to cut staff).

As usual, the bigger the staff size and the bigger the market, the more likely that the station increased staff. But – not as usual – the bigger the staff size, the more likely the station also cut news staff.

Non-commercial stations were twice as likely to add staff as commercial stations, but a year ago, the margin was four to one. And non-commercial stations were noticeably more likely to cut staff than commercial stations. Of course, non-commercial stations started with more staff to begin with.

The bottom line for all of this is: 2021 appears to have been a year of turmoil in radio staffing.

On the plus side, news directors and general managers clearly expect a better 2022. The percentage saying they expect to increase staff is nearly double what it was a year ago. As usual, the bigger the station and the bigger the market, the more likely that management expects to increase staffing. Non-commercial stations are five times more likely to expect to increase staff than commercial stations, but they’ve always been an optimistic lot.

Radio digital staffing mostly steady

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found a mixed picture in digital staffing. Full time went down 0.1 while part time rose by the same amount.

How many people work on the digital side? 2022

| | Full-time | Part-time | Total |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| All Radio | 0.7 | 0.8 | 1.6 |
| Market size: | | | |
| Major Market | 1.7 | 0.5 | 2.2 |
| Large Market | 0.8 | 1 | 1.8 |
| Medium Market | 0.6 | 0.8 | 1.4 |
| Small Market | 0.4 | 0.9 | 1.3 |
| | | | |
| Commercial | 0.6 | 0.7 | 1.3 |
| Non-commercial | 1 | 1.2 | 2.2 |

Major market digital staffing went down a hair, but all others went up, even if just a little. Commercial radio held steady, overall, while non-commercial went up.

Do other staffers help on the web? 2022

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| All Radio | 61.6% |
| Market size: | |
| Major Market | 62.6 |
| Large Market | 60 |
| Medium Market | 63.2 |
| Small Market | 60 |
| | |
| Commercial | 57.8 |
| Non-commercial | 69.6 |

It appears that as more digital people are being hired in radio, fewer other staffers are being called to help on the digital side. Every category of other staffers helping on the web went down in the latest survey, with the overall percentage dropping by 10 points.

New and replacement hiring

The average radio station hired 0.5 replacement positions and 0.2 new hires. Replacements are up a bit from last year, but new hires are exactly the same. The median, or typical, for both replacements and new hires remained at 0. That's exactly what it's been for the last seven years. In other words, the typical radio station made no hires whatsoever.

The top radio replacement position – by a huge margin – are reporters, at 49% of all replacement positions. Reporters have been on top the last few years, but this is a jump of 9 points from a year ago. Quite a few stations, especially non-commercial ones, noted specialty reporters: education, political, health, diversity, climate and others.

Management positions – mostly news directors – came in next at 18%. That’s a big jump from last year. Anchors/hosts came next at 15%, followed by digital at 9%, producers at 7% and announcers at 3%.

The top new position in radio news again this year were reporters, at 52% of all new hires. That’s down 4 points from last year. Producers, at 18%, edged out digital at 15%. Anchors/hosts came in at 9% with management positions at 6%. But the bigger point is that there were very few new hires this past year

In radio, 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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About the Survey

The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2021 among all 1,780 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,379 radio stations. Valid responses came from as many as 1,336 television stations (75.1%) and 765 radio news directors and general managers representing 2,310 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.