



Local TV News Employment Takes a Big Hit

By Bob Papper with Keren Henderson

June 16, 2022 – The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey shows the total full-time local TV news employment decreased 6.3% compared to last year – from a record high of 28,000 down to 26,250.

The biggest hits in full-time employment came in the smallest markets, which dropped 8.5% in staff size from last year to this, followed by markets 26 to 50, which fell 7.7%. The top 25 markets went down 4.1% while markets 51 to 150 actually went up, ever so slightly.

Median part-time staff held steady, but average part time went down pretty much across the board.

Some of the overall drop in employment came from the loss of four newsrooms, as the total number of local TV newsrooms fell from 710 last year to 707 this time around. It’s a loss of four and not three because one of those 707 newsrooms is new and hadn’t yet hired a staff as this was written.

TV 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 TV	40.2	34	150	2.5	1	26	42.3	36	160
Big four affiliates	41.9	36	150	2.3	1	24	43.8	37	160
Other commercial	26.2	15	82	5.7	1	26	31.9	16	100
Non-commercial	11.6	7	38	1.8	2	3	13.4	7	40
Market size:									
1 - 25	67.3	73.5	137	6	2.5	26	73.2	75	159
26 - 50	56	61	97	3.1	2	13	57.6	62	104
51 - 100	47	44	150	1.7	1	11	48.7	47.5	160

	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
101 - 150	30.3	30	68	2.5	1	24	32.7	33	70
151+	19.4	18	43	1.3	0	10	20.7	20	45

The pain was remarkably widespread. Other commercial stations got hit harder than the big four affiliates, but everyone went down. All the affiliate groups went down; all the regions of the country went down.

TV staff size changes ... the past year (2021)

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Don't Know
All TV	23.6%	27.7%	48.2%	0.5%
Big four affiliates	24.5	28	47	0.5
Other commercial	13.3	33.3	53.3	0

As you'd expect, more stations reported decreasing staff than increasing staff, although the margin is surprisingly close given the overall drop. The most widespread decreases came in markets 26 to 50 and markets 101 to 150. Both groups had more than 30% of stations cutting staff. Fox affiliates, followed by NBC affiliates, were much more likely to cut staff than ABC or CBS stations. Stations in the Northeast took the biggest hit. Nearly half the stations in the Northeast reported cutting staff – more than three times as many that added staff.

But 2022 appears to be a different story.

TV planned staff changes ... the next year (2022)

	Increase	Decrease	Same	Not sure
All TV	44.1%	2.3%	47.3%	6.3%
Big four affiliates	46.5	1.5	46.5	5.4
Other commercial	20	13.3	60	6.7

Clearly, local TV news directors are optimistic about hiring this year. The percentage expecting to add staff is up a whopping 18 points from last year – and at its highest level since we started tracking the question 21 years ago. News directors in every market size overwhelmingly expect to add staff, with those in the smallest markets, followed by those in the biggest, leading the way. Other commercial (and non-commercial) stations are not nearly so optimistic.

TV digital staffing largely unchanged

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that, overall, full-time TV digital news staffing held steady compared to a year ago. The top 25 markets led the charge; other market sizes were up a bit and down a bit. Part time mostly dropped from a year ago.

How many people work on the digital side? 2022

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All TV	3.7	0.9	4.7
Markets 1-25	6.6	1.6	9.1
Markets 26-50	4.8	1.2	5.6
Markets 51-100	4.3	0.6	4.9
Markets 101-150	3	0.9	3.5
Markets 151+	1.7	0.7	2.4

In TV, same-station comparison puts digital staffing dead even with a year ago. There are no consistent differences by network affiliation or geography.

Do other staffers help on the web? 2022

All TV	69.9%
Markets 1-25	57.9
Markets 26-50	61.7
Markets 51-100	63.4
Markets 101-150	73.7
Markets 151+	84.6

TV news staff participation on the web slid by about two and a half points. The biggest and smallest markets rose by just a hair; the others dropped, especially markets 26 to 100.

What does the staffing look like for an “average” TV station?

In real life – or even in a TV newsroom – it’s not easy to divide people into fractions. Thankfully, it’s no problem on paper. This is what the latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey says the “average” local TV news department of 40.2 people looks like:

News Director	1
Assistant News Director	0.6
Managing Editor	0.4
Executive Producer	1.3
News Anchor	5.3
Weathercaster	3.4
Sports Anchor	1.4
News Reporter	2.5
MMJ	5.1
Sports Reporter	0.5
Assignment Editor	1.2
News Producer	6
News Writer	0.1
News Assistant/AP	0.2

Photographer	5.4
Video Editor	2
Graphics Specialist	0.2
Digital Content Manager	0.8
Social Media Producer/Editor	0.4
Web/Mobile Writer/Producer	1.8
Other	0.6

A quarter of the list remained unchanged from last year: news director, assistant news director, executive producer, weathercaster and digital content manager. Just four positions went up: managing editor, MMJ, news producer and web/mobile writer/producer. All other positions went down.

“Other” was scattered among a variety of technical, dual jobs and various one-off positions.

MMJ use up slightly

Even as their use is being debated from a safety standpoint, the percentage of MMJs edged higher this past year. The RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey has tracked MMJ growth for more than a dozen years. The last few years, the numbers have tended to go up a little, then down a little. This year is up a little. The “mostly use” category rose by 7 points and the “don’t use” category dropped by almost 2.

The top 25 markets dropped a bit in the “mostly use” category, but all other market sizes went up, and all markets, except 51 to 100, went down in the “do not use” category.

Percentage of TV newsrooms reporting using MMJs - 2022

	Yes, Mostly Use MMJ	Yes, Use Some MMJ	Yes, But Not Use Much	No, Do Not Use
All TV	66.5%	20.1%	10%	3.3%
Market size:				
1-25	34.8	26.1	30.4	8.7
26-50	21.4	32.1	35.7	10.7
51-100	63.2	26.3	7	3.5
101-150	82.8	17.2	0	0
151+	95.3	4.7	0	0
Staff size:				
51+	26.1	39.1	26.1	8.7
31-50	70.5	24.6	4.9	0
21-30	88.1	9.5	2.4	0
11-20	96.7	3.3	0	0
1-10	82.4	5.9	0	11.8

The tipping point for news reporter vs. MMJ is in markets 51 to 100. Bigger markets have more news reporters than MMJs, and markets smaller than that are overwhelmingly MMJs. In 51 to 100, the margin is 71% to 29% in favor of MMJs. That puts MMJs down three and a half from last year, reversing a steady trend toward more and more MMJs.

New and replacement hiring

The latest RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that the average TV station hired 7.4 replacements during 2021 and 1.4 new, additional positions. Replacements are up 2.2 from a year ago, and new positions are up 0.3. The averages look pretty good, but the medians are lower. The median (or typical) TV station hired six replacement positions but no new hires. None. Stations in the South again hired the most replacements, but stations in the Northeast led in new hires.

Who got hired? These are the top TV replacement hires:

1. MMJs ... 23% ... same and still in first place
2. Producers ... 21% ... same and still in second place
3. Anchors and anchor/reporters ... 12% ... same but up from 4th place last year
4. Reporters ... 9% ... down 3 points from last year and down from third place
5. Weather ... 8% ... up 2 points and two places
6. Digital (including digital producers and managers) ... 7% ... up 1 point but still in 6th place
7. Photographers ... 7% ... down 2 points and 2 places
8. Video editor ... 4% ... up 1 point and 1 place
9. Sports anchor and reporter ... 3% ... same but down a place from 8th last year
10. Assignment desk ... 3% ... new to the top 10 this year

All other positions totaled 3%.

New hires

Two-thirds of all new TV hires were among just three positions:

1. Digital ... 25% ... up 4 points and up a spot back into first place
2. Tie: MMJs ... 20% ... down 5 points and one place into second
Producers ... 20% ... same as last year but up a spot to tie for second
4. Anchors ... 8% ... up 5 points and four places from last year
5. Reporters ... 5% ... down 5 points and down a spot from fourth place a year ago
6. Tie: Weather ... 4% ... down 2 points
Sports ... 4% ... new on the list
Photographer ... 4% ... down a hair
Assignment desk ... 4% ... up a hair

10. Executive producer ... 3% ... new to the list

All else totaled 7%.

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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.