

Retransmission Consent Revenue at Work: Reinvesting in Local News and Programming

Congress provided local TV stations with the right to negotiate with cable, satellite and telecommunications companies for the fair market value of their broadcast signals. This process is known as retransmission consent.

Local television stations increasingly rely on this compensation to provide important viewer services, such as local news, public affairs programming, coverage of emergency weather events and community activities.

Numerous studies show that growth of station revenues increases news production.

A recent survey conducted by Hofstra University and the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)¹ confirms that TV stations are reinvesting revenues in their newsrooms, for the benefit of all viewers.

Here are the highlights:

- The average TV station set a new record in 2011 for the amount of local news aired – the average amount of weekday news rose to five and a half hours per weekday last year.
- More than 45 percent of TV stations reported an increase in the amount of news they aired, with only 1.5 percent of stations reporting a decrease.
- Even in a sagging economy, jobs in TV newsrooms grew 4.3 percent in 2011, to reach total full-time employment of 27,653 – the second highest level of TV news employment ever.
- Stations hired an additional 1,131 anchors, reporters, producers and other news staffers.
- There are an average number of 38 news employees per TV station, though that varies by market size, with major market stations averaging nearly 68 employees dedicated to providing stellar local news and information for viewers.
- This growth is likely to continue. More than one-third of stations (36.7 percent) said they expected to increase their news staff in 2012, with only 2.4 percent expecting to decrease staff size. Nearly one-third of stations (31.2 percent) also expect to increase the amount of news aired in 2012, with no stations expecting to decrease their news programming.

Providing the best possible local news, weather and emergency information is all in a day's work for local TV stations, and this critical viewer service is supported by the retransmission consent process.

Congress should allow the private, free-market retransmission consent negotiations to continue. Eliminating local stations' ability to negotiate for the value of their signals would mean less choice and information for viewers.

1 RTDNA/Hofstra University TV and Radio News Staffing and Profitability Survey, conducted in the fourth quarter of 2011 among all 1,735 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 3,000 radio stations.