

# ***MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR INDUSTRY***

## **A SURVEY OF WORKERS AND THEIR ATTITUDES ABOUT :**

- **THE STATE OF JOURNALISM AND BROADCAST NEWS**
- **THE IMPACT OF MEDIA CONSOLIDATION ON THEIR  
PROFESSION**
- **THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES OF FURTHER MEDIA  
CONCENTRATION UNDER NEW FCC RULES**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

This report presents the results of a survey of 400 members of four unions in the media industry. The survey was designed and conducted by Lauer Research Inc. on behalf of AFTRA, NABET, The Newspaper Guild and The Writers Guild of America, East. These four unions represent workers on the front line of the media industry, including producers, reporters, editors, anchors, writers, artists and technical employees working in the print, television, radio and Internet industries. The survey assesses the impact of current consolidation in the industry on the employment conditions of media workers. The survey asks media workers to assess the implications of ongoing consolidation on the public, including changes in the type, amount, variety and quality of programming and products available. Finally, frontline media workers were asked their opinions of possible further consolidation in the media industry as proposed by the FCC.

Interviews were conducted over the telephone by trained, professional callers working from a centralized location between February 21<sup>st</sup> and February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The sample for this survey was derived from updated lists of members of each of the four unions. An every nth selection process was used to give every member an equal chance of being selected. Interviewers made up to three call back attempts per household to maximize the possibility of

interviewing less accessible members. The sampling error for a 400 person sample is plus or minus 4.9%. Margin of error for data applying to each individual union and other smaller subgroups of the sample are subject to sampling error as high as 9.9%. For this poll, respondents were interviewed only if they confirmed that they are currently a member of one of the four unions.

The following report includes our interpretations and analyses of the data. Charts referred to throughout the text are included in the Appendix. Questions not included in the charts are noted in parentheses throughout the text. A copy of the questionnaire is also appended at the end of the report.

This report is confidential and intended solely for the use of our clients. Any questions concerning the report should be referred to Lauer Research Inc.

### **CROSSTAB KEY**

The following definitions describe some of the less than obvious subgroups discussed in the report. Question numbers refer to the questionnaire and percentages refer to each subgroup's proportion of the total sample.

**STAFF STATUS** *On Staff* (76%) are currently on the staff of a media organization. *Freelance* (18%) are not currently on the staff of a media organization and work in a freelance capacity. *Other non-staff* (6%) are not currently on the staff of a media organization and work in either a daily hire or temporary worker capacity (Q.4, Q.6).

**LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT** refers to the respondents' tenure at their current place of employment (Q.67).

**LENGTH IN MEDIA** refers to the respondents' tenure in the media industry (Q.68).

**INDUSTRY** *Print* (26%) includes workers in the newspaper, magazine, news service and wire service industries. *TV* (52%) includes workers in the television industry. *Radio* (24%) includes workers in the radio industry. Please note that multiple responses were accepted for this question and totals may be greater than 100% (Q.69).

**DEPARTMENT** *News* (57%) includes workers in the news department. *Sports* (14%) includes workers in the sports department. *Entertainment* (9%) includes workers in the entertainment department. *Business* (10%) includes workers in the marketing, advertising, circulation and administration departments. Please note that multiple responses were accepted for this question and totals may be greater than 100% (Q.70).

**JOB** *Producer* (19%) includes all producers. *Reporter* (19%) includes all reporters. *Technical employee* (19%) includes all employees who work in a technical capacity. *Anchor* (9%) includes all anchors. *Editor/Writer* (22%) includes employees who work in either an editorial or news writer capacity or both. Please note that multiple responses were accepted for this question and totals may be greater than 100% (Q.71).

**HEARD ABOUT CONSOLIDATION** *Great deal* (39%) respondents say they have heard a great deal about the FCC proposal to increase the number of TV, radio and newspaper outlets one company can own nationally and in any one community. *Some* (41%) have heard some about the proposal. *Not too much/Nothing at all* (20%) have not heard much or anything about the proposal (Q.10).

**EXPERIENCE BUYOUT/MERGER** *National Yes* (28%) work at a national or other non-local media organization and have worked at a company in the last five years that was bought out or involved in a merger. *National No* (22%) work at a national or other non-local media organization and have not experienced a buyout or merger in the last five years. *Local Yes* (25%) work at a local media organization and have worked at a company in the last five years that was bought out or involved in a merger. *Local No* (22%) work at a local media organization and have not experienced a buyout or merger in the last five years.

## 2.0 CURRENT STATE OF THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

The current state of affairs as perceived by frontline media workers is of an industry beset with problems and undergoing changes which have had a deleterious impact on the workforce and the quality of journalism presented to the public. While respondents are, for the most part, satisfied with their job (37% very satisfied; 42% somewhat satisfied in Q.8), they report a significant decrease in workplace morale over the past few years. Many have either been downsized personally or know colleagues who have been laid off, and a majority (53% in Q.25) report that companies they have worked for in the past five years have been bought out or involved in a merger. According to media workers, the consequences of station buyouts, understaffing, and an increased focus on the bottom line have led to a decrease in the overall quality of journalism, a loss of credibility with the public and an increase in local coverage of entertainment, weather and sensationalistic scandal stories at the expense of covering local news and public affairs.

Chart 1 shows that a majority (53%) of respondents report a decline in employee morale at their workplace over the past one or two years. Workers who have undergone a merger or buyout report a greater decline in employee morale than do those at media outlets that have not been merged or bought

out (national merger - 57% decline vs. 52% decline among national no merger; local merger 61% decline vs. 44% decline among local no merger). Among the four unions, NABET members are most negative with 62% seeing a decline in morale. Also, media workers who have been at their current place of work 11 or more years are more negative in their outlook than are newer workers.

Charts 2 and 3 detail downsizing and layoffs in the media industry. One-in-five media workers report personally being laid off in the past five years, while fully 76% say they know of at least one colleague or co-worker who has lost their job in the past five years. Chart 3 shows that there is greater than average propensity for layoffs among NABET (28% personally laid off) and WGAE members (25%), technical workers (28%), anchors (29%), at national companies that have undergone a merger or buyout (26%) and among workers age 55 and over (24%). Jobs are more secure at TNG (9% personally laid off), at local companies that have not merged (9%) and among reporters (11%). Overall, workers at national organizations (22%) are more likely to have been laid off than workers at local organizations (16%).

Chart 4 highlights activity in the local media arena over the past five years. A clear majority (68%) report the buyout of a local radio station by a national radio chain. Forty-four percent report the purchase of a local television

station by a large corporation, and 40% report the purchase of a local cable operator by an outside chain or corporation. One-third (33%) of media workers have experienced the purchase of a local newspaper by an outside newspaper chain or corporation.

Chart 5 details the effects of the current level of consolidation on the media workplace and media coverage. Media workers agree that understaffing (73%) is undermining the quality of news coverage at their organization. They are also highly concerned about a lack of time and resources to do a professional job (68% adversely affected). A majority (50%) notes the detrimental effect of the shrinking volume of news content (50%). Respondents are relatively less concerned about pressure from advertisers to shape coverage (33%) and outside control of editorial policy (29%).

Chart 6 further explores problems facing the media industry. The most serious problem is too much emphasis on the bottom line, with fully 83% saying it is a very serious or serious problem. Other top concerns include the influence of ratings/circulation on coverage and programming (82%), a loss of credibility with the public (79%), a decrease in the overall quality of journalism (79%), a lack of quality in local coverage (74%), incomplete reporting and errors (73%) and too little attention paid to complex issues (72%). Evidently, the focus on the bottom

line is leading to understaffing and a loss of time and resources, which in turn leads to a decline in quality and a more negative public opinion of the media industry and its workers.

Workers are also concerned about changes in particular types of coverage, with less diversity of opinion (69%), less public policy (67%) and fewer meaningful stories (65%) being covered. Again we see a relatively low level of concern about the influence of advertisers (54%).

Chart 7 looks more closely at changes in types of local coverage. Most notably, media workers report a huge increase (67%) in entertainment coverage at their local news operation. Other significant increases are seen in the coverage of scandals (56%) and weather (56%). A plurality (37%) report a decrease in coverage of local government policies and actions. One-in-five (21%) also report a decrease in local elections and politics coverage.

### 3.0 FCC PROPOSALS FOR CONSOLIDATION

Media workers are aware of the FCC proposals for further consolidation. Fully 80% report knowing a great deal or some about the proposal to increase the number of TV, radio and newspaper outlets one company can own nationally and in any one community (Q.10). There is, however, some confusion as to the current status of the media ownership proposal. Regardless, there is a clear consensus among media workers that the impact of each of FCC proposal for further consolidation will have a net-negative impact on both the industry and the public. We will detail each element of the FCC proposals below.

Chart 8 shows that 39% of all respondents know a great deal about the FCC proposal to increase the number of media outlets one company can own. WGAE (52% great deal) and AFTRA (45%) members are highly aware of the proposal, while only one-quarter (24%) of TNG members know a great deal about it. National media workers are more informed about the proposal (42% great deal) than are workers in local media outlets (34%). Long-term media workers are more likely to know a great deal about the proposal than are those workers who have joined the industry in the last 20 years. A majority (52%) of radio workers are aware of the proposal, compared with 42% of television

workers and only 25% of those who work in print media.

While a majority (56%) of respondents are aware that the FCC media ownership proposal is still being considered, Chart 9 shows that a substantial 39% don't know enough about the status of the proposal to say. It is important to communicate to these workers that the FCC is still pursuing these new media ownership proposals.

Chart 10 shows 79% of media workers feel that allowing one company to own more news outlets will have a negative impact on their community and the country. Only 7% predict a positive impact. Chart 11 shows a similar reaction to the FCC's cross-ownership proposal. Here 76% predict a negative effect on the community in which cross-ownership occurs. When asked to volunteer what will happen under cross-ownership, 39% of respondents cite less diversity in media coverage. Other potential problems include less competition (18%), too much control in the hands of a few (12%), a reduction in staff/jobs (11%) and the potential for additional news bias (8%). Fully 87% of respondents were able to volunteer at least one adverse consequence of cross-ownership.

In Chart 12, we see an equally negative assessment of the FCC's proposal to allow one company to own multiple television stations in the same market

(82% negative) and a high level of concern about this proposal's impact on diversity of viewpoint (39%), a reduction in competition (23%), staff cuts (13%) and too much control in the hands of a few (9%). Respondents also note the impact of multiple TV station ownership on the availability of program choices (7%). Eighty-nine percent of media workers can volunteer a negative consequence of this proposal.

Media workers are slightly less worried about a proposal to increase the total number of broadcast television stations the major networks can own nationwide (see Chart 13). Here 57% predict a negative impact, 16% see a positive outcome, 10% say it will not make a difference and 17% are unsure of the proposal's impact on the country. Nonetheless, they see the same negative outcomes associated with this proposal—less diversity (24%), less competition (18%), more centralized control (12%), fewer program choices (11%) and a decrease in job security for media workers (8%).

A summary of the possible consequences of the FCC proposals for further consolidation is highlighted in Chart 14. Among all respondents, the lack of diversity and variety in programming is, far and away, the most compelling argument against further consolidation (40%). It is of even greater concern to local workers who have been involved in a merger (47%) and have seen the

effects of consolidation first hand. Other areas of concern include too much control in the hands of a few (17%), a decrease in competition (16%), a further reduction in news coverage (15%), and creation of more news bias (12%). Local workers who have yet to be involved in a merger are more concerned than average about the decrease in competition (25%) and national workers who have been bought out or merged are more likely than average to cite a reduction in news coverage (21%). Here, fully 90% of respondents can cite at least one adverse impact of consolidation on the media industry.

## 4.0 IMPACT OF FURTHER CONSOLIDATION

In addition to the volunteered consequences of further consolidation discussed above, media workers predict that a variety of specific things — many of which will further undermine employee morale, job security and the programming and products delivered to the public — will occur in the event of further consolidation.

Chart 15 shows that control over coverage and constricted viewpoints are top concerns. Eighty-six percent of respondents say fewer points of view will be offered and 86% also say that control over news and programming decisions will be concentrated in too few corporate hands. Other quality concerns include increased commercialization of the news (84%), more corporate bias (79%), a decline in the quality of news coverage (78%), less flexibility for local coverage (72%) and a decreased ability to adhere to local standards (58%).

On the workplace side of the issue, 62% expect a decrease in their ability to advance and get a better media job, 45% cite a loss in work hours, a full 38% fear outright job loss and 36% are worried about losing their health coverage.

Chart 16 shows overall disagreement with the idea that the increasing

amount of news available over cable and the Internet will offset the consolidation's negative effects on quality and variety. A majority (52%) disagree with the statement. Groups most opposed to the idea include WGAE members (60%), long-term media employees (60%), media workers age 18-34 (59%) and women (58%). Only 12% of all media workers strongly agree that cable and the Internet will be able to pick up the slack.