

TELEVISION  
NEWS PRACTICES  
IN MISSOURI

By Samuel Brownstein



KHQA-TV

KTTS-TV

KSD-TV

WDAF-TV

KWK-TV

KMBC-TV

KOMU-TV

KCMO-TV

KDRO-TV

KFEQ-TV

KYTV

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

While the responsibility for this study rests completely with the writer, many other persons contributed materially to its completion. Personnel at all the television stations included in this study were most cooperative and deserve sincere thanks for their assistance.

A debt of gratitude also is owed Mr. Jean Madden, who copyread the original thesis; Dr. Edward C. Lambert, who patiently guided the study; and Dr. Earl F. English, Dean of the School of Journalism, who made publication possible.

# *Television News Practices*

## *in Missouri*

By Samuel Brownstein

This is an abbreviated report of a study made of the methods used by eleven Missouri television stations to collect and present the news. The data were collected between June 7 and October 10, 1954, and concern all stations which were operating on Missouri grants on July 12, 1954. Emphasis was placed on news programs which were originated by the individual television stations. This included general news, farm news, sports news, and weather news.

At all or almost all of the stations investigated, this writer noted certain tendencies which he believes deserve particular mention. First, none of the stations required sponsors to pay any special production costs for news. A system of pro-rating production costs, used by Richard Oberlin of WHAS-TV, Louisville, might be a practical way for these stations to put the news programs on a firmer economic base while being able to meet the expense of better news programs.

Second, too often these stations had a greater tendency to tailor the news to fit available pictures than to tailor the pictures to fit the news. Increased use of local still and motion picture photography and still and animated graphic representations could change this situation. The final point is that almost no weekend news was presented on these stations. It seems unlikely that viewer interest in news takes a two day holiday each week.

Despite similarities, some of which result from these stations all being situated in a single state and all being VHF, a myriad of individual conditions have acted to make the facts of life of each news department a somewhat unique experience. Before looking at these individual facts of life, however, it will be best to look first at the stations as a whole.

During a composite week, these stations programmed a total of 1,025 hours and twenty-five minutes. Of this, forty-six hours and fifty-five minutes were devoted to locally originated news. The average daily

time spent on these programs was thirty-seven minutes. Almost all of the 342 news programs presented during the composite week were week-day programs. Most were presented in the evening, partly because some of the stations did not sign on until late in the day.

The format for almost all of the news programs was a combination of man-on-camera and visual aids. Most frequently these aids included still pictures and standard properties. Sometimes motion picture film was used, and infrequently graphic representations. Only twenty of the programs were voice over slide, while twenty-seven were man-on-camera, and seventy-five were a combination of man-on-camera, motion picture film, and other aids.

Generally, fewer visual aids were used on sportscasts than on general news programs. On some sportscasts, a scoreboard was the only visual device. Visual aids on weather programs were limited almost completely to weather boards.

Of the eleven stations, eight regularly used newsmen as newscasters; the others used staff announcers. Newscasters delivering general news at these stations read almost all of it from visible scripts. The tendency during sportscasts was to ad-lib at least part of the sports news, usually from visible notes, and all weathercasts were ad-libbed from memory or hidden notes.

While none of the stations depended on sponsors to pay special production costs, the news budgets of at least four stations were partly dependent upon sponsorship of the news programs.

Much of the news budget was used to buy equipment and services. All stations used at least one leased wire and five had two or more. All but one had the use of a commercial still picture service, while three also had daily news film services. Nine stations owned still picture cameras, most frequently Polaroids, and five owned motion picture cameras. Three others contracted with outside photographers for local motion pictures. In all cases the footage of local film used was so little that it was developed by hand or was processed at an outside laboratory.

The seven stations that reported production costs, excluding salaries, gave a range of from sixty to eight hundred dollars weekly, averaging \$372.76. Economic limitations, and personnel at nine stations said that they believe the cost of producing news on television is too high.

The number of full-time employees at these stations ranged from one to eight and in most cases these same men also were responsible for

radio news. Salaries of newsmen at eight stations averaged \$96.50, ranging from \$50 to \$135.00 weekly. Almost all newsmen were experienced in radio news; few had newspaper experience. Many were college graduates who had majored in journalism.

Nine of the news departments considered local news to be of greatest importance ordinarily. Yet eight of the news departments rewrote almost all of the wire news before it was presented. Only one station, KDRO-TV, regularly editorialized on newscasts, although others conducted infrequent campaigns.

In all cases, at least some member of the news staff could have regular programming interrupted for the presentation of special bulletins. For various reasons, these newsmen generally were reserved in their use of this authority.

Management at five stations have "requested" that news releases from sponsors be used on news programs. Newsmen at all stations, however, were committed emphatically to the principle that no news would be deleted at the request of a sponsor.

## **KHQA-TV**

KHQA-TV, channel seven in Hannibal, has been operating in conjunction with WTAD-AM, Quincy, Illinois, since September 21, 1953. During the week investigated, KHQA-TV, affiliated with CBS and DuMont, devoted 5.9 per cent of total programming to locally originated newscasts.

The KHQA-TV, WTAD-AM news department included five men, headed by Don Nicholson. This department had the use of AP and UP radio wires, AP Photofax, a Polaroid camera, and three tape recorders.

KHQA-TV operated with newsmen as newscasters. Those men worked on the assumption that local news is of greatest importance, taking time to rewrite only a small portion of the wire service copy.

At the time of the study, KHQA-TV was presenting ten ten-minute general news programs each week. Visual aids used were about ten flip cards during each presentation. About 35 per cent of the news was collected by the news staff or paid correspondents. Other general news programs included six five-minute shows, mostly man-on-camera.

Ten sports news programs, varying in length from seven to twelve minutes, also were presented. Visual aids on each of these programs included about five flip cards and a superimposed scoreboard. Also on the weekly schedule were ten five-minute weathercasts.

## KSD-TV

When KSD-TV began operation on channel five in St. Louis, February 8, 1947, it was the only television station in Missouri. Owned by the publisher of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the station is operated in conjunction with KSD-AM. During the week studied, 4.2 per cent of all programming was devoted to locally originated news programs. In addition, the station, which was affiliated with NBC, CBS, and ABC, carried news from NBC on *Today* and the *Camel News Caravan*.

Warner Schoyen, news director of KSD-AM-TV, had a staff of one television writer and eight experienced radio newsmen. The news department had the use of daily INS Telenews motion picture film, AP Wirephoto, AP radio wire, and two tape recorders. Local still pictures were taken by *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* photographers. Local motion picture film was contracted for with outside photographers.

A cardinal rule at KSD-TV was that there should be no visual production that did not help viewers understand the news. Thus some stories, by choice, were presented by the man-on-camera technique. At other times, motion picture film, still pictures, actual news objects, and still and animated graphic representations were used to illustrate the news.

News stories were selected for their probable interest to viewers. Local origination was not a special consideration in this selection. All news was written especially for each newscast and read by staff announcers.

At the time of the study, KSD-TV each week was presenting twenty local general news programs of five minutes length each, mostly without visual aids. Fifteen minute general newscasts, five of them, also were on the schedule. About half the news on these programs was gathered by the news staff or came from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Each of these programs used about six flip cards, and four to five minutes of film. Also, each week there were five ten-minute general newscasts. These were similar to the fifteen-minute programs but used only about two minutes of film and included a sports scoreboard.

Other programs included ten five-minute weather programs and five ten-minute sports news programs.

## KWK-TV

KWK-TV, channel four in St. Louis, began telecasting July 8, 1954. The station, partly owned by the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, is operated in conjunction with KWK-AM. During the week investigated, locally originated news programs took 4.6 per cent of total programming. The station, affiliated with CBS and ABC, carried network news on *Douglas Edwards and the News* and the *Morning Show*.

The news director, Jack Griffin, was assisted by three full-time journalism school graduates and had the part-time assistance of four other men, including two photographers. News and picture services of the station were: UP and AP radio wires, AP Missouri wire, a Western Union sports ticker, AP Wirephoto, AP Photofax, and UP-Movietone daily news film. Station equipment included: two motion picture cameras, one equipped for sound recording; a Polaroid camera; and a Speed Graphic camera. The station also had access to photographs from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

Griffin said that he believes local news is most important, but all news ought to be written especially for each telecast. The news was announced on KWK-TV by a special newscaster, staff announcers, and an announcer hired by a sponsor.

At the time of the study, weekly presentations included ten five-minute local general news programs, with the news read over changing telops. Seven other five-minute general news programs, combining man-on-camera with telops, flip cards, and film also were presented. Each of thirteen ten-minute general news programs included from three to four minutes of motion picture film, three telops, and ten flip cards as visual aids. About half of the news for these programs was gathered by the news staff and the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, mostly by the latter.

Five-minute sportscasts, five weekly, each combined man-on-camera with from one to two minutes of film, four flip cards, and a scoreboard. A fifteen minute sportscast was programmed three Wednesdays a month. About 65 per cent of this was local news, and the program included as visual aids about four and one-half minutes of film, thirteen flip cards, and a scoreboard. Another fifteen-minute sportscast, a weekly roundup,

used about six minutes of motion picture film and thirteen flip cards as visual aids. KWK-TV also presented twelve five-minute weathercasts each week.

## KOMU-TV

KOMU-TV is the commercial television station of the University of Missouri. The station has been operating on channel eight in Columbia since December 21, 1953. During the week studied, locally originated news shows took 4.1 per cent of total programming. Although the station was affiliated with all four major networks, it carried no network news programs.

Philip E. Berk, news director, had a staff of three part-time photographer-newsmen and University students taking courses in television news. The news department operated with a two-fold function: to present the news and to provide training for students. Department equipment and services included: a portable tape recorder, UP radio wire, UP Telephoto, a Polaroid camera, a Speed Graphic camera, and a motion picture camera. About three hundred feet of film were taken weekly and developed by hand in the station darkroom.

Berk said he believes that local news is of primary interest to his viewers and that he considers the coverage area of the station to be the local area.

When this study was made, KOMU-TV presented five weekly general news programs on which the news was read over the test pattern by one of Berk's assistants. These programs lasted about fifteen minutes and were mostly composed of news taken directly from the UP radio wire.

Ten other general news programs, each ten minutes in length, were read weekly by Berk. All copy was written especially for each newscast, and an average of 40 per cent of the news was local. Visual aids for each of these presentations were about five balops and five flip cards. Several times weekly, film stories also were included. Five-minute weathercasts followed each of Berk's newscasts.

Five sportscasts a week also were presented by KOMU-TV. Visual aids for each of these ten-minute programs were about four flip cards and a split screen with a balop roll scoreboard. Almost all of the news,

about 25 per cent of which was collected by the sportscaster, was ad-libbed from visible notes.

## KDRO-TV

KDRO-TV began telecasting July 12, 1954, on channel six in Sedalia, in conjunction with KDRO-AM. During the week studied, locally originated newscasts took 12.6 per cent of total programming time.

Bob Younger, the sole member of the news department of KDRO-AM-TV, had the part-time assistance of the station photographer. Equipment and services of the station were: two tape recorders, AP radio wire, an Argus C3 still camera, and a motion picture camera with a zoom lens. The photographer was able to develop motion picture film by hand in the station darkroom.

Younger ordinarily announced almost all of the general news and weather programs, ad-libbing the weather and local news. Wire copy, which filled about 70 per cent of the newscasts, was read without re-writing.

On weather programs Younger used a weather board as a visual aid. All other news programs were mostly man-on-camera.

When this study was made, KDRO-TV listed the following news programs on its schedule each week: sixteen five-minute and two fifteen-minute general news programs, seventeen five-minute weather programs, and six ten-minute sportscasts.

## KYTV

KYTV began telecasting October 1, 1953, on channel three, Springfield. Although the station is associated with KWTO-AM and the *Springfield Leader and Press*, the operations were completely separate and did not aid each other in news gathering. During the week studied, KYTV, an NBC and ABC affiliate, used 4.7 per cent of total programming for locally originated news programs.

The news director, Richard Hainline, had the part-time assistance of a photographer and a reporter. Services and equipment included AP radio wire, AP Photofax, a Polaroid camera, and a Speed Graphic camera.

Hainline said he believes that the entertainment content of television news programs must be high. To provide this, he used a rigid format

which put a still picture on the screen during alternate news stories, the newscaster being on the screen while reading the other stories. From 60 to 70 per cent of all news was local, and about 10 per cent of the wire news was rewritten.

During the week, each of the five ten-minute general newscasts used about nine flip cards and one slide. The six fifteen-minute newscasts presented weekly included about seventeen flip cards and one slide. The other news programs telecast each week were ten five-minute weathercasts.

## KTTS-TV

KTTS-TV has been operating in conjunction with KTTS-AM-FM in Springfield since March 14, 1953. During the week studied, the Springfield channel ten station devoted 8.9 per cent of total programming to locally originated news programs. While the station did not carry news programs from the networks with which it was affiliated, CBS and DuMont, two film shows were presented: *Week's News in Review* and *Week's Sports Review*.

Bill Bowers, head of the KTTS-AM-FM-TV news department, was assisted by two newsmen and had the part-time services of the station photographer. Station equipment and services included: several tape recorders, a Leica still camera, AP radio wire, UP Telephoto, and a motion picture camera equipped to record sound. The photographer was able to develop motion picture film by hand in the station darkroom.

Bowers said that he believes his viewers are most interested in local news. He had a large network of contacts throughout the area, and even strangers stopped him to give him news. He attributed this latter situation to his face having become familiar through his television newscasts.

Bowers used tape recordings to dramatize local happenings and to localize national happenings. Almost immediately after the Puerto Rican Nationalists fired into the House of Representatives in Washington, D. C., KTTS-AM-FM-TV was on the air with the recorded eye-witness account of Representative Dewey Short.

KTTS-TV presented nineteen fifteen-minute general news programs each week at the time this study was made. Each newscast was about 70 per cent local and included as visual aids about nineteen slides. In addition, there were two general news roundups, each fifteen minutes

long, read over slides. About half the news on these weekly programs was local. Other presentations each week included nineteen five-minute weathercasts and eleven ten-minute sportscasts.

## WDAF-TV

October 16, 1949, WDAF-TV, channel four in Kansas City, became the second television station to begin operation in Missouri. This station, a sister operation of WDAF-AM, is owned by the *Kansas City Star*. During the week studied, 6.3 per cent of total programming was locally originated newscasts. News from NBC was carried on the *Camel News Caravan* and *Today*.

The news and special events director, Randall Jesse, was assisted by a six man staff and had the part-time services of three *Kansas City Star* reporters.

Equipment and services included AP radio wire, AP Wirephoto, and a Polaroid camera. The *Kansas City Star* also supplied the station with still pictures. Motion picture film was contracted for with an outside photographer.

Jesse said that it is his conviction that special effects, as well as movement by the newscaster around the set, can distract from the news content. He also seemed to prefer the use of newsmen as newscasters.

Over telop headlines, five local general news programs, each five minutes in length, were presented weekly by WDAF-TV. The station also presented each week six fifteen-minute general newscasts, each of which used about ten telops as visual aids. Visual aids on twelve ten-minute general newscasts weekly were about four telops on each and silent film about twice during the week. About one-third of the general news was local, and about half of the wire news was rewritten before being included in the news script.

A total of thirteen five-minute weather programs also was presented weekly.

Sportscasts each week included five five-minute programs and one fifteen-minute program. The five-minute programs each included as visual aids one silent film clip, four telops, and a scoreboard. Visual aids on the longer sportscast were three silent film clips, eight telops and four flip cards.

## KMBC-TV

KMBC-TV began telecasting August 2, 1953, on channel nine in Kansas City. The station, a CBS affiliate, was operated in conjunction with KMBC-AM. During the week studied, this television station devoted 4.9 per cent of total programming to locally originated newscasts. In addition, *Douglas Edwards and the News* and the *Sunday News Special* were presented from the network.

Claude Dorsey, KMBC-AM-TV news director, had a staff of six newsmen and the part-time assistance of the station photographer. The general practice was that each newsman would write the newscasts he was to deliver. Station equipment and services included: tape recorders, a Polaroid camera, a Speed Graphic camera, AP and UP radio and newspaper wires, AP Wirephoto, and UP-Movietone daily news film. Local motion picture film had to be contracted for with an outside photographer.

Weekly presentations by KMBC-TV included eleven fifteen-minute general newscasts. Six of these each used about five minutes of motion picture film and eight telops as visual aids and were about 30 per cent local news. The remaining fifteen-minute general news programs were about 60 per cent local, used little film, but made use of about ten telops and five flip cards in each presentation. Local general news was presented over telops on five five-minute programs.

Sportscasts presented each week by KMBC-TV included eleven ten-minute programs. Six of these were delivered by the sports director, using telop scores and about two film stories during the week. The other sportscasts were given by the assistant sports director whose visual aids for each presentation included about fourteen telops. About 20 per cent of all the sportscasts were devoted to local happenings.

KMBC-TV also offered eleven five-minute weathercasts each week.

## KCMO-TV

Channel five in Kansas City is KCMO-TV, operated in conjunction with KCMO-AM and affiliated with ABC and DuMont. The station has been telecasting since September 27, 1953. During the week studied, KCMO-TV devoted 5.5 per cent of total programming time to locally originated news programs. Other news carried was the network program, *John Daly and the News*, and the film program, *Weekly News Review*.

Jim Monroe, special events and news director, had a staff of seven newsmen and one photographer. His department had the following at its disposal: AP radio and newspaper wires, AP Wirephoto and Photo-fax, four Polaroid cameras, and four tape recorders.

Monroe said he believes that in a picture presentation of the news there is an underlying factor of entertainment or human curiosity. To satisfy this, KCMO-TV used three steps: to present the most important news stories, to use all pictures available that concern these stories, and to present other news stories for which pictures are available.

Generally, each newsman wrote the newscasts which he was to deliver. Newsmen selected stories based on the individual merit of the stories, which made local news average about 30 per cent of newscasts.

Each week, ten-minute general newscasts, each using about nineteen flip cards as visual aids, were presented by KCMO-TV. Other newscasts were five fifteen-minute news, weather, and sports programs. These used different announcers, one for each news division. Also, five times during each week, the KMBC-TV farm director gave five minutes of livestock and market news, followed by ten minutes of other farm news. Flip cards and actual news objects were used as visual aids on these programs. Other news programs during the week were five fifteen-minute sportscasts, using a scoreboard, flip cards, and actual objects as visual aids, and ten five-minute weathercasts.

## KFEQ-TV

KFEQ-TV, channel four, has been operating in conjunction with KFEQ-AM, St. Joseph, since September 29, 1953. During the week studied, KFEQ-TV used 7.9 per cent of its total programming time to present locally originated news programs. Although the station was affiliated with CBS and DuMont, it carried no network news programs.

Ralph Combes, the KFEQ-AM-TV news director, had a staff of four newsmen and had the part-time services of the station photographer. Station services and equipment included: AP radio wire, AP Wirephoto, two Polaroid cameras, and a motion picture camera. The photographer was able to develop motion picture film by hand in the station darkroom.

Generally, newsmen prepared the scripts which they were to deliver. About 20 per cent of the news was local; the rest was usually read just

the way it came from the wire. KFEQ-TV began using a "kicker" on television when a viewer told Combes that the newscaster ought to smile at least once in a while.

KFEQ-TV presented twelve fifteen-minute general newscasts each week. Visual aids for each were about six Polaroid pictures and fifteen flip cards. Five ten-minute sportscasts made use of silent film at least once each week. Other news programs were eleven five-minute weathercasts and five sportscasts weekly. These five-minute sportscasts used about eleven flip cards as visual aids.