A short list of commonly carried national programs drives much of the listening to public radio news stations, but there are huge differences in the performance of this format across the country.

In 2008 the Station Resource Group and Walrus Research reported the performance of public radio news stations in 30 large markets. We reviewed the significant differences in audience impact among these stations, explored factors that predicted those differences, and flagged a few top performers that might point the way for others.

We are returning to those questions, and others, with new audience estimates, a new audience measurement system (the Portable People Meter), and a larger set of markets and news stations to explore.

In this first report we take a quick look at the news “franchise” in the top markets to set the stage for our questions. We will continue with three additional reports:

- Predicting the audience for news stations
- The relationship between audience and listener support
- Does the size of the local news staff matter?

Reports and notes on methodology are available on the GROW THE AUDIENCE website: www.srg.org/GTA

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In 2010 most large radio markets had at least one public radio news station – a number had two.

This chart, arrayed by market size, shows shares of listening to public radio news stations in the markets measured with Personal People Meters (PPM) by Summer 2010.

The bars with two colors show markets with two news stations. Each portion of these bars shows the share of a different station.

Our study includes:
- Stations that offer a predominately news/talk schedule on weekdays from 6am-7pm.
- To sharpen the analysis we included only those stations that:
  - Carry Morning Edition.
  - Are home to a PPM market
  - Have at least a 0.5 share in their home market.

Houston, Atlanta, Tampa, Pittsburgh, and Austin did not have an “all news” public station as of this study. Some stations shown above are not included in our statistical analyses. WUOM in Detroit is not home to that market. KQEI, the smaller station in Sacramento, repeats KQED from San Francisco. WAMU Washington also has a substantial share in Baltimore; the same is true for WGBH Boston in Providence. We analyzed their metro share and rating only in their home markets to predict audience performance. But we analyzed their entire audience to predict listener support. WPLN-AM repeats WPLN-FM (both in Nashville) and the two are combined in the study.
The first steps in our analysis are:

- Sort stations by whether or not they have an exclusive claim to the public radio news franchise in the market.
- Rank them by the share of listening they capture in their respective markets.

The chart shows 24 public radio news stations with an exclusive franchise for public radio news.

There are major differences in the share of audience among stations with the “exclusive franchise.”

WUNC tops the chart with a 7.5 share in Raleigh-Durham.

The median of the group is a 3.3 share for WLRN, Miami.

The lowest share is 0.5 (our cut-off point for inclusion) at KVCR Riverside, CA.
Here are 13 stations that have direct format competition – a “non-exclusive” franchise for public radio news.

There are significant differences among these stations, too.

The top station is KQED with a 5.5 share in San Francisco. San Francisco is also served by KALW.

The median is KPCC with a 1.9 share of listening in Los Angeles.

The lowest share in this group is 0.5 for KCPW in Salt Lake City.

The chart uses the same scale as the previous one, to illustrate generally lower shares in this group.

Note: WUWM has news competition from Wisconsin Public Radio’s WHAD, although WHAD does not carry Morning Edition or All Things Considered.

WNYC FM has competition from sister station WNYC AM, although AM does not carry Morning Edition.
Strategies to increase share and strategies to increase reach are closely aligned for public radio news stations.

This chart illustrates a nearly perfect correlation between reach (cume rating) and share. Over 93 percent of the variance in share is explained by the cume rating.

In effect, they are measuring the same thing for this format: the stations’ public service relative to their markets.

WUNC is the leader in both share at 7.5 and in reach at 16.8. KCRW has a 0.9 share and 3.7 reach.

Some believe that programmers must make a choice between working to increase their station’s reach or going for a larger share. For the public radio news format, it amounts to the same thing.
Coming Next

In our next report we will examine factors that explain much of the dramatic differences in reach and share seen among these public radio news stations.

We will then turn to the relationship between audience size and individual giving – how much do the differences in the size of a station’s audience translate to differences in the amount their listeners give?

Our final report in the series will look at whether the size of a news station’s newsroom affects the size of its audience and the amount of its support from listeners.