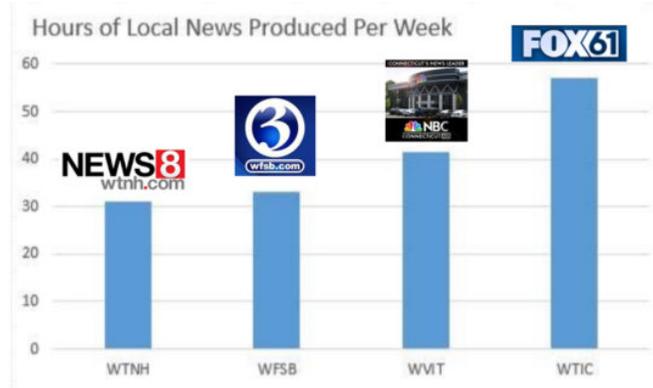


MEDIA

'News Year' resolutions for Connecticut TV in 2017

JANUARY 3, 2017

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We're going to see a lot of changes in Connecticut television news in 2017. New Haven's ABC affiliate, WTNH, is getting a new owner for the second time in two years (<http://www.hartfordbusiness.com/article/20160108/NEWS01/160109944/sales-negotiation-for-wtnh-parent-thick-with-complications>). WFSB, the state's top-rated news station, is reportedly cutting back on sports coverage (<https://thelaurelct.com/2016/12/15/speaking-of-sports-well-maybe-not/>) – eliminating dedicated sportscasts at 6 p.m., and instead only giving sports a few minutes of coverage at 11 p.m., and only on Wednesdays through Sundays. And News 12 Connecticut plans to begin broadcasting its shows from studios in New Jersey, starting in March. (<http://ctviewpoints.org/2016/11/08/live-but-is-it-local/>)

So with those changes in mind, here are five “News-Year resolutions” I’d like to see happen in 2017. They’re changes I think will (to paraphrase the new president) “make local news great again.”

1.) Cut back on the endless barrage of “breaking news.”

This idea goes against everything television journalists know. From their first day in a newsroom, they’re told to be ready to drop everything at a moment’s notice to cover the latest news that comes across the police scanner. The problem is, there’s always a shooting, stabbing, fire, or traffic accident in a media market the size of Connecticut. Most

of those stories end up being so inconsequential, no one will remember them five minutes later. Just because a story happens during, or within a few hours, of a newscast, doesn't mean it is urgent news. Still, those every day, "nickel and dime" stories need to be covered. So where should they go?

2.) Use the station's website more.

How about on the stations' websites? Most local TV websites are little more than a place to put re-writes of the news shown in the earlier broadcasts. They may add more details or allow for comments or sharing on social media, but they rarely break new ground or new stories. Stations want their "good stuff" to air on TV first. But what if instead of making the web an afterthought, make it the place people can go to see coverage of that day's shooting, stabbing, fire or traffic accident? That way, the newscasts can...

3.) Cover news of greater consequence.

By pushing everyday "crime and grime" to the website, TV reporters will be free to cover important stories in-depth. Right now, TV reporters are lucky if they do just one story a day. Often times, they're assigned to cover two or more stories on different topics, or told to put together two or three different versions of their stories for different newscasts.

But if they're allowed to spend a day, or even more, covering a story, they'll be able to talk to more people, gather more facts, and cover more ground. Stories that take longer to explain, like the consequences of Connecticut's budget crisis, the impact of opioid addiction, and the state of small towns' economies, would get more airtime. That's needed, because newscasts should...

4.) Stress quality over quantity.

Right now, Connecticut's four major network affiliates air an astonishing amount of local news. They range from 57 hours each week on Fox 61, to a mere 31 hours a week on WTNH.

To put that in perspective, if you started watching Connecticut's local news on January 1, and continued 24-hours a day, 7-days a week, you wouldn't run out of broadcasts until sometime around December 18. The trouble is, there's not enough local news to fill all of that time. Reporters and producers are forced to re-tell the same stories over and over again, or air news that doesn't matter to viewers.

So instead of putting on news all day long to try and catch viewers, stations should try programming to the DVR and on-demand generation. They should encourage people to record the news at a set time, and watch it when it's convenient. That way, more effort can be put into producing each individual show and in turn will help...

5.) Keep local news local.

With the Internet, social media, and 24-hour cable news, people don't need to watch their local anchors explain stories happening around the country or around the world. You can get non-local news anywhere. But you can only watch local stories on local TV. Instead of trying to be a one-stop news source, local TV would better serve its audience if it plays to its strength, and becomes the go-to source for local information.

Unfortunately, like most other New Year's resolutions like losing weight, exercising more, or spending less, these resolutions are probably doomed from the start. Resolution 1 won't happen because of competitive pressure. When the boss yells, "Channel X is covering this – why aren't we?" breaking news will quickly go back on-air.

Resolutions 2 and 4 would cost stations too much money. Websites bring in far less advertising revenue than TV commercials. Plus, when stations are forced to choose between airing syndicated shows, and sharing ad revenue, or producing their own news, and keeping all the money from commercials, it's not a difficult choice.

Finally, resolutions 3 and 5 are doomed to fail because serious news is a tough sell to TV audiences used to viral videos, 140-character tweets, and SportsCenter Top 10 Plays. As soon as ratings start to dip, stations will get cold feet about trying something new.

Still, we can dream 2017 will be the year local news changes for the better.

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(<https://www.qu.edu/academics/colleges-schools-and-departments/school-of-communications/>)

