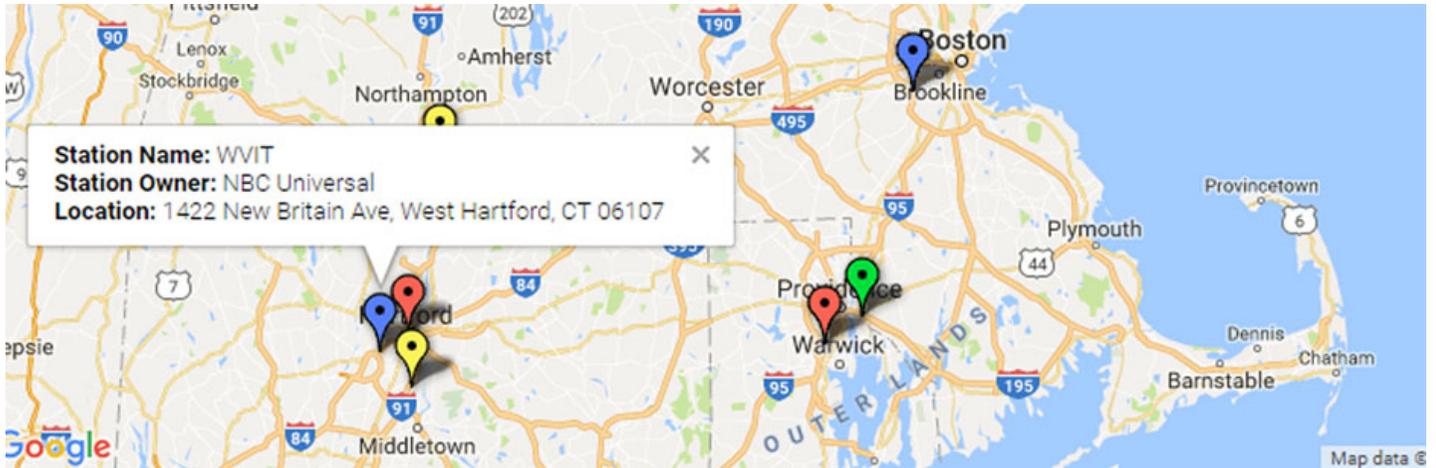


## MEDIA

# 'Shop local' when it comes to TV news

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“Shop Local” is a phrase you hear a lot when it comes to shopping for [food](http://www.ct.gov/doag/cwp/view.asp?a=3243&Q=523758) and [holiday gifts](https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/shop-small/). The theory is that you get higher-quality products when you buy from people you know, and help support the local economy at the same time. But “shopping local” could soon be a lot more difficult when it comes to watching TV news in Connecticut.

The Federal Communications Commission voted last week to consider [eliminating a rule](http://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/washington/fcc-proposes-eliminating-main-studio-rule/165961) that requires TV stations to maintain a physical studio, with full-time management and staff, in the city where the station is licensed. If the proposal goes through, TV viewers could start to see their “local news” produced in a far-away city, or even a different state. That’s because current technology makes it easier and cheaper to produce news from centralized “hubs” and send it out electronically to other locations, rather than produce it in expensive studios in dozens of separate cities. This is especially true when several communities are within a reasonable driving distance of each other.

Take, for instance, Iowa-based [Meredith Corporation](http://www.meredith.com/local-media/broadcast-and-digital). It currently owns two stations that reach Connecticut: [WFSB](http://www.wfsb.com/), which is licensed to Hartford, and [WGGB/WSMH](http://www.westernmassnews.com/) which is licensed to Springfield, Massachusetts. The two stations are

located just 38-miles apart and already have a close relationship and nearly identical websites. But under the current rules, they must remain separate entities, each with its own staff and studio capable of broadcasting news and weather reports.

If the proposed rule change goes through, however, Meredith could theoretically shut down its Springfield studio and produce Western Massachusetts news from its larger news complex in Connecticut. Meredith would want to keep some reporters and photographers in Massachusetts, but that could be done by renting out a storefront as a bureau, rather than staffing a fully-functional studio.

Similar regional news-sharing agreements could also form between Connecticut's three other major network affiliates and their nearby sister stations. Nexstar's [WTNH](http://wtnh.com/) in New Haven and [WPRI](http://wpri.com/) in Providence are just two hours away from each other. NBC Universal's [WVIT](http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/) in West Hartford and the [NBC Boston station](http://www.nbcboston.com/) in Newton, Massachusetts are also about two hour's drive apart. And Hartford's [Fox 61](http://fox61.com/), in line to be purchased by Sinclair Broadcast Group, is just 90-minutes away from Sinclair's Cranston, Rhode Island station, [WJAR](http://turto10.com/).

While there's no indication any of these regional consolidations are in the works, it would, for the first time, be legal if the proposed FCC rule changes go through. The recent trend of smaller TV ownership groups being bought up by larger mega-owners also could make it a more likely reality.

Earlier this month, Sinclair Broadcast Group announced plans to [buy Tribune Broadcasting's TV stations](http://sbgi.net/pr-news/sinclair-broadcast-group-to-acquire-tribune-media-company-for-approximately-3-9-billion/), including Hartford's Fox 61. If the deal goes through, Fox 61 will go from being one of 42 stations owned by [Tribune](http://www.tribunemedia.com/our-brands/tribune-broadcasting/), to one of at least 233 stations operated by [Sinclair](http://sbgi.net/). And back in January, [Nexstar Media Group](http://www.nexstar.tv/) bought New Haven's WTNH from Media General, making WTNH one of 170 Nexstar stations nationwide. (By comparison, NBC Connecticut is one of 28 stations owned by NBC Universal and WFSB is one of only 15 owned by Meredith.)

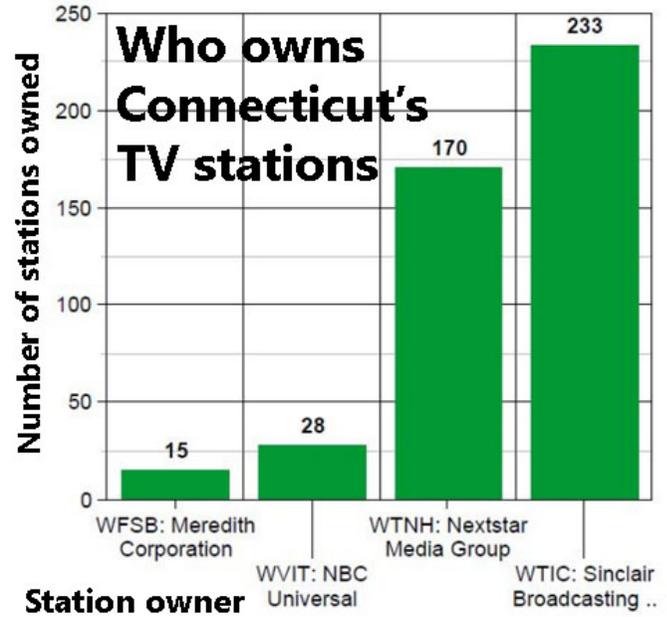
The existence of these mega-ownership groups, while potentially profitable for investors, can lead to a series of unpleasant results for viewers. The first consequence is cost-cutting, to earn back the billions spent to buy TV stations. Viewers could see familiar (and expensive) long-time anchors leave, and be replaced by young and cheaper talent. Viewers may also start to see a more homogenized look on-air, as TV graphics and set designs are changed to match the other 200+ stations in the ownership group. Finally, more nationally-produced segments can begin to appear in local newscasts, as big ownership groups find it cost-effective to air "franchise stories" such as health news, consumer reports, and national political news out of corporate headquarters, rather than producing them individually in hundreds of local cities.

All of that is troublesome because the best way to produce news is by gathering, reporting and broadcasting it in the same area where viewers live. Reporters, after all, can only understand what's important to a community if they actually live in it and frequently talk to everyday people.

<https://b1h5m2032en80y5e457vfgsq-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/files/2017/05/who-owns-tv.jpg> So besides lobbying the FCC

<https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/filings/express>) against changing the “Main Studio Rule” ([docket 17-106](https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/search/filings?proceedings_name=17-106&sort=date_disseminated.DESC)), how can you help stop this move towards regional news hubs and large corporate ownership of local TV news? The best way is to “vote with your eyes and ears.” Figure out which local stations are starting to outsource their news, and stop watching them. Instead, turn to stations owned by smaller ownership groups with a commitment to local coverage.

If an outsourced station’s ratings start to dip, the big ownership groups will quickly take notice. That’s because the profits they’re making from creating “news hubs” will quickly disappear, with their ratings. Falling profits are, after all, the last things corporate owners want to see.



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