

MEDIA

It's live, but is it really local?

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Television stations seem to love one word above most others. Marketing consultants have come up with dozens of ways to say it. It's almost a game: how many ways can you weave the word "local" into a catchy slogan?

Popular variations include: "Local First," "Live, Local, and Late Breaking," "More Local. More News," "Where Local News Comes First" and "The Local Station." The reason? People want to think the news they're watching is produced "where they live" (another popular slogan!) by local people covering news that "matters to you" (still another popular catchphrase!) But these slogans are sometimes hiding a secret.

Many local stations aren't as local as you think.

Take News 12 Connecticut (<http://connecticut.news12.com/>), for example. The channel, using the slogan "as local as local news gets," has been broadcasting 24-hours a day, in and around Fairfield County, for the past 34 years. Its mission is to cover stories that are missed by New York City's local news (Fairfield county is considered part of the New York City television market, which also includes the lower Hudson Valley, Long Island and Northern New Jersey.) Six other

separately-run “News 12s” follow the same mission, covering hyper-local news in [The Bronx](http://bronx.news12.com/), [Brooklyn](http://brooklyn.news12.com/), the [Hudson Valley](http://hudsonvalley.news12.com/), [Long Island](http://longisland.news12.com/), [New Jersey](http://newjersey.news12.com/), and [Westchester County](http://westchester.news12.com/).

But while viewers rely on News 12, its new owner, international telecom company Altice, isn't as loyal. It apparently saw redundancy in former owner Cablevision's model of operating seven nearly identical stations in a relatively small geographic area. So to reduce costs, Altice is reportedly planning to [consolidate news producing and anchoring into centralized hubs covering more than one region by March 2017.](http://www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2016/10/news_12_connecticut_production_to_be_shifted_to_nj.html)

For News 12 Connecticut, that means moving the channel's operations 80 miles away from its current home in Norwalk, to Edison, N. J. That's right – Connecticut newscasts will soon be produced two states away, near the intersection of the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway.

The move is actually less complicated than it may seem. Reporters and photographers will remain in Connecticut, since you obviously can't cover news from that far away. But the newscast producing – where journalists take the individual stories, place them in a logical order and write shorter stories to fill in the gaps between the reporter stories – can be done anywhere with an Internet connection and access to email and a phone.

The same is true for the anchoring. All you need is a set with a background image that says “News 12 Connecticut” to look like you're broadcasting down the street. News 12's new owners are apparently betting viewers won't notice any change at all.

While broadcasting Connecticut news from New Jersey may seem like an odd concept, it's actually an idea that's been tried before. In early 2002, Time Warner Cable opened up News 12-like channels across upstate New York. Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo all got stations that reported and produced local news, weather and sports for their cities.

But within a decade, the channels, now owned by Charter Communications and re-named [Spectrum News](http://www.twcnews.com/), started to consolidate. Weather for all the stations is now produced out of a central hub, along with some non-news programming like cooking segments. Some newsrooms even produce multiple newscasts, each aimed towards different parts of the state.

Around the same time, [Sinclair Broadcast Group](http://sbgi.net/), the largest owner of television stations in the country, experimented with something called “News Central” at more than 100 of its stations.

Here's how it worked: local journalists would produce the first 15 minutes or so of a newscast. But when it came time for weather or sports, the stations would run pre-packaged segments that originated from Sinclair's headquarters in Maryland. Those segments would be tailored to the local stations, however, so it still sounded “local” by talking about

local teams or the local chance for rain. Sinclair, like News 12, was hoping viewers wouldn't notice (or care) that they never actually saw the meteorologist and their local anchors sitting on the same set. But apparently people did notice, since Sinclair shut down News Central in 2006.

The practice of outsourcing news coverage, however, is not dead. Some stations are now producing newscasts for smaller stations in distant cities. Viewers of [WLBZ](http://www.wlbz2.com/) in Bangor, Maine, for example, may think they're watching local news. But their shows are actually produced at sister-station [WCSH](http://www.wcsh6.com/) in Portland, Maine, using a combination of news gathered in both cities. That saves the stations' owner the cost of running two separate studios, two-hours apart.

But the oldest trick for making news look local is the simplest to accomplish. Local anchors often toss to reporters in Washington D.C. or other far-away places. When the national story ends, the correspondent says something like, "Reporting from Washington, I'm (their name, your local news station)," giving the impression he works in local TV. But that "sig out," as it's called, is fake as well. National reporters record dozens of them at a time, saying they're from stations all around the country. All a local newscast producer has to do is call the network and ask for it.

So the next time you turn on the local news, watch a little closer. Contrary to what the station wants you to believe, the anchor might not be reporting from "where you live."

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