

What Is a Producer?

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Asking what a producer is or does is a little like asking “how deep is a hole?” Ask a hundred different people and you’ll probably get a hundred different answers.

The short answer is that a producer does anything and everything to get a newscast on the air. They are with the newscast from beginning to end, not just the half hour or so that the newscast is on the air. Producers are involved in the editorial meetings that lay out what the newscast will eventually look like, and then they are there in the control room when the show actually goes on the air. Depending on the size of the station, this process can be extremely short and simple. But usually, it is a lengthy and exhaustive process that challenges every skill the producer has: planning, writing, editing, resource management, delegation of authority, and decision making under deadline pressure, just to name a few.

First and foremost, producers must produce a newscast of a predetermined length. For most television producers, this means a half-hour or hour-long show; radio producers deal with much shorter programs. That is the reality that faces every producer when he or she begins each work day. A certain amount of news time must be filled for the show to go on the air. The time constraints cannot be ignored, delayed, or forgotten. Many producers liken them to a hungry beast that must be fed every so often. Feeding the beast requires a variety of skills, including news judgment and value, putting stories in the correct order, and making sure the show gets on the air properly. Ultimately, producers are judged by the quality of the on-air newscast.

But producing is far more than simply putting a show on the air, as computer software can now easily arrange a newscast with a minimum of effort. Obviously, much of the difficulty lies in the process. Producers must oversee the various components of the production process, and

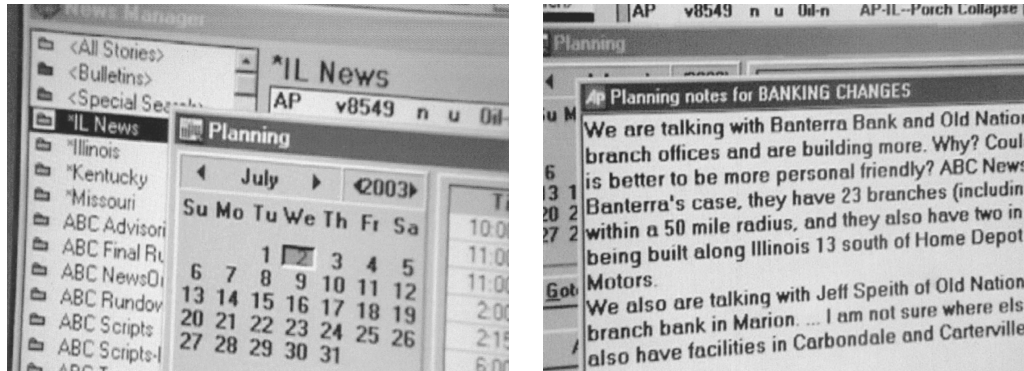


Figure 1.1 Producers Must Process Hundreds of Pieces of Information Each Day, Usually Under Deadline Pressure

SOURCE: Photographs by Mary Lou Sheffer. Printed by permission.

these components have a tendency to break down or operate dysfunctionally. News vans will break down or live shots will fail. Photographers will get lost on the way to a story, or reporters will change story assignments. Breaking news will often force producers to rearrange a newscast at the last minute. There could be problems with the production, engineering, or traffic departments, all of which affect the newscast.

Technology has also made the role of the producer more complex. Improving technology, from digital communication to satellite transmission, means that producers must now deal with more information, and in less time, than ever before. Oftentimes, critical decisions must be made in seconds. In case of failure or the need to make a sudden change, producers must know exactly where to go and what to do next. In this sense, critical decision making under deadline pressure is one of the most important attributes of the news producer.

Producers must also be amateur psychologists. The producer is responsible for pulling together the people that contribute to the newscast and getting them to work together as a team, which is not always easy. Newsrooms are filled with jealousy, personal animosity, and strained relationships. Reporters may balk at working with certain photographers or vice versa. As silly as it sounds, producers will sometimes have to referee serious arguments in the newsroom, if they're not a part of the argument themselves. Even when everyone tries to work together, people can misunderstand their assignments, leading to confusion and delay. All of this takes place under the watchful eye of the news director, to whom the producer must report.

The producer is also expected to contribute to the content of the newscast. Reporters will cover most of the bigger stories, but producers usually

write many of the other stories in the newscast. Thus producers must be good communicators, writers, and editors.

Finally, despite the need for producing on a daily basis, there is also a long-range aspect of producing. As a member of the news management team, the producer provides input to the news director about the direction of the newscast. Does the look of the newscast need changing? What components of the newscast need to be reevaluated for the future? More frequently, producers must engage in long-range planning for special event programs. Often, months of planning will go into the production of news programs for election night, political debates, local roundtable discussions, and so on. The producer plays a pivotal role in this planning, as he or she will be the one in control of the program on the day that it airs.

By now, you should be thinking of the producer as someone who must possess a variety of important skills. Much of this relates to the producer's position in the newsroom and his or her place within the station's news structure.

Newsroom Structure

Every news organization has some sort of hierarchical structure or organization, most of which are very similar. The producer deals with almost every one of these departments in the process of putting together a newscast.

THE STATION MANAGER

At the top of the structure is the station owner, general manager (GM), or station manager (SM). Many times, especially at smaller stations, these roles will all be handled by one person. But because of increasing consolidation and corporate ownership in the industry, a station manager or general manager will usually run the station on behalf of the station owners.

Very seldom does a producer deal with a station manager. The manager is more concerned with the day-to-day operation of the station, of which news is only a small part. Some managers prefer a more hands-on approach to news and want to get heavily involved in the news production process. More often, however, they will delegate responsibility for the department to a news director and stay out of daily news decisions. Managers do have ultimate hiring and firing responsibility at the station, and that may be the only time producers actually talk to them.

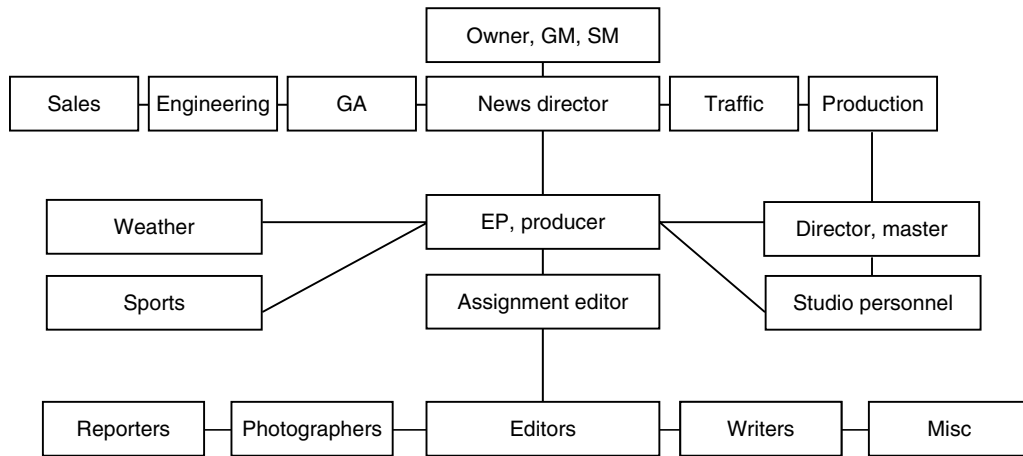


Figure 1.2 Typical Television and Radio Newsroom Structure

Note: EP indicates executive producer; GA, general administration; GM, general manager; Misc, all others under the assignment editor; SM, station manager.

THE NEWS DIRECTOR

The news director has direct authority over the newscast producers and is responsible for the overall news product of the station. Unlike that of a producer, this responsibility is not just the nuts and bolts process of getting shows on the air. News directors are more concerned with large-scale issues, such as overall news quality, audience feedback, and long-range planning. This is not to say that news directors have no interest in the day-to-day workings of the newscast, but having delegated most of that responsibility to producers, they are free to focus on the news department as a whole.

Producers work very closely with the news director in planning the newscast. Most days, the news director, producer, and several reporters will take part in an editorial meeting to discuss what stories merit coverage in the newscast and how to cover them. The editorial meeting usually gives the producer a good idea of what the newscast will eventually look like. By the end of the meeting, producers know what stories will be covered, the importance of each story, and which reporters will be working on them. The news director usually takes a strong hand in the editorial meeting, outlining what he or she would like to see covered. Once these decisions have been made, the news director usually turns over the show to the producer.

The news director will talk with the producer several times a day to check on the progress of the newscast. A producer might go to the news

director with any major problems or concerns but usually does not need approval to make minor changes to the show. As with station managers, different news directors have different management styles. Some are very hands-on and want to get involved in the actual news production process. Others prefer to delegate that responsibility to the producer. Unless there are major problems or breaking news requires drastic changes, the news director typically lets the producer put the show together.

Ideally, the news director should be available to give feedback to the producer after the show. This can be done in person, when the news director and producer sit down to discuss the newscast, or it can be done in the form of a written critique distributed to the entire newsroom. Either way, it is important for the producer to know the strong and weak points of the newscast. Unfortunately, not many news directors take time to do this because of time restrictions or other deadlines. Many times, the only time the producer knows how the news director feels about the show is when it goes badly. In those cases, feedback is often immediate and forceful.

The relationship the producer has with the news director will have a direct bearing on the quality of the newscast in general and the producer's future in particular. It is virtually impossible to produce a good newscast if the news director and producer are not working together and do not share the same news philosophy. It is also unlikely that both parties would remain in such a situation, and usually the producer would want to find another job. This is why it is essential for the producer to cultivate and maintain a good working relationship with the news director. This does not mean that the two have to be friends, but rather suggests such things as good communication, trust, and respect.

For more on the relationship between the news director and producer, see chapter 8.

THE ASSIGNMENT EDITOR

Aside from the news director, producers work most closely with assignment editors. Assignment editors are responsible for the coordination of news coverage, which primarily means assigning reporters and photographers to cover certain stories. They have to juggle the schedules of all the people going out to cover news, making sure that reporters have enough time to do their stories. Many times, assignment editors will have reporters cover two or three shorter stories a day or will pull reporters off one story and send them to another.

In addition, assignment editors are responsible for coming up with story ideas. They take part in the daily editorial meetings, monitor other local news media, and listen to police and fire scanners for breaking



Figure 1.3 Assignment Editors Must Stay in Constant Contact With News Personnel
SOURCE: Photograph by Mary Lou Sheffer. Printed by permission.

news. They also sort through the mounds of information that come into a station every day, including news releases, meeting announcements, and story ideas phoned in by the audience as news tips. It is a job of constant communication and activity, especially during times of breaking news.

The producer needs to stay in constant contact with the assignment editor to see what, if any, changes need to be made to the newscast. The assignment editor will be one of the first to know if coverage of a story falls through or the story needs to be changed in format. For example, if a reporter gets delayed coming back from a story, that story might need to be moved to later in the newscast. Assignment editors can warn the producer of potential problems in these areas.

Technically, because the producer is in charge of the newscast, he or she has authority over the assignment editor. But it is a much better situation if the two work together, instead of one trying to control the other. Producers who become too authoritative with assignment editors (or other newsroom personnel) find that those people are much less willing

to contribute to a quality newscast. The assignment editor position is one of the most thankless jobs in the newsroom, but it is absolutely vital in terms of helping the producer with the newscast.

REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

Even though the assignment editor coordinates the activities of reporters and photographers, it is really the producer who depends on them the most. Producers must know how reporters are covering their stories. Constant communication is essential, for if reporters deviate from their assigned coverage, it is likely to mean that the producer will have to make changes to the newscast.

After the editorial meeting, reporters and photographers get their story assignments. This includes not only the type of story but the format. There are different ways to cover stories, depending on their importance, the resources available, and the deadline involved (see chapter 3). Generally, more important stories are covered as live or packaged reports, and other stories are limited to voiceovers or short interviews.

Producers expect that reporters and photographers will cover their stories in this predetermined fashion, unless circumstances dictate otherwise. There are many circumstances that could change the way a story is covered, including equipment breakdown, the need to switch reporters to another story, or lack of time to meet deadline. It is imperative that reporters and photographers keep in constant communication with the producer so any changes can be made promptly. No producer wants to make a major change to the newscast minutes before show time.

At the same time, producers must have backup plans available in the event that such changes must be made. If a reporter is assigned to cover a story as a live shot and engineering loses the live signal right before the story goes on the air, the producer must have alternatives. These are things that a good producer considers ahead of time, well before the show ever starts.

Most producers do not try to dictate the content of reporters' stories. They understand that reporters and photographers have specialized training in this area and are also much closer to story sources and information. However, producers should feel free to suggest things that would help improve the reporter's presentation, such as different people to talk to, possible locations for live reporting, and other places to get information. Aside from this, producers want to know two main things from reporters: the format and the length of their stories.

Most of the problems between producers and reporters come from poor communication. Producers need to clearly define what they expect from reporters on their stories, and reporters need to maintain constant

contact with producers to make them aware of anything that would require changes to the newscast. Chapter 8 goes into more detail about the relationship between reporters and producers.

THE PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

The production department is technically not part of the news department and spends much of its time putting together commercials. But this department has a prominent role during the newscast, as it is responsible for the technical part of getting the show on the air. The key person in this regard is the technical director, who sits in the master control room during the newscast and supervises the audio and video presentation of the show. Audio personnel adjust audio and microphone levels, graphic artists work with chyrons (any printed material that appears on the screen), and tape operators roll taped stories at their appropriate time. Much of this process is becoming streamlined as more stations switch to digital technology. For example, many stories are now simply stored as computer files and not even put on video or audiotape.

Before the newscast, the producer and technical director may discuss the basics of the newscast—what stories go where, the specific technical needs, and any out of the ordinary requests such as special graphics. An hour or so before the show, the director will go over the list of stories and mark them to his or her specifications. Copies will be distributed to other members of the production team working in master control so that everyone is aware of what is going on.

During the newscast, the producer watches from master control but leaves the technical part of the show to the director. The producer focuses more on timing and organizing the show (see chapter 3). Stories are constantly being dropped, added, changed, and moved within the newscast, and all these decisions must be made by the producer. The producer must also make sure that the show times out correctly. This means it must begin and end at a certain time, and these times are usually very rigid. To account for changes in time, producers will add or drop stories or ask the news anchors to speed up or slow down in their presentation. Oftentimes, certain segments of the show will be adjusted to compensate for time problems. If the show is running long, for example, a producer might have to cut the sports segment from 3 minutes to 2½.

The producer is not expected to know how the production department works or how to “punch” the show from master control. Technical directing is a highly specialized skill, beyond the scope of producing. However, the producer should realize that no matter how well the show is put together, it does not mean anything if the show cannot get on the air. Producers should make every effort to create an effective working relationship with the technical director that is built on solid communication.

THE ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

The engineering department is in charge of protecting, maintaining, and improving the technical equipment associated with running a media outlet. In a news sense, this particularly applies to electronic news gathering (ENG) equipment, such as cameras, microphones, news vans, and satellite trucks. Engineers spend some of their time on preventive maintenance and trying to keep equipment from breaking and much more of their time fixing equipment that has already broken. This last job is especially important, considering that the high cost of new technology makes it difficult to replace equipment.

Like the production department, the engineering department is not a part of the news department but still plays an important part in the newscast. Producers assume that reporters and photographers will have working equipment to cover stories. If some of the equipment is not working, it will influence how a producer puts a show together. For example, if the station live truck is inoperable, it would eliminate certain options for covering a story. Producers need to know if certain ENG equipment is not working or is unavailable.

Beyond that basic knowledge, producers rely more on engineers for satellite transmission and live story coverage. Certain stories require the downloading of satellite feeds, which is particularly true in the case of network newsfeeds. Most organizations have relationships with larger media outlets that involve these outlets providing national and regional news material on a daily basis. Because this information is sent by satellite, it is imperative that the satellite reception process works properly. Producers count on many of these stories to use in their newscasts and rely on engineers to keep the process running smoothly.

Engineers are more directly involved in the news process when the story involves a live report, which has become quite frequent in modern news reporting. Many stations want to go on location, either by satellite truck or microwave unit. The microwave unit is the more common method: the kind of news truck with a high mast that sends a microwave signal back to the station. Engineers have to make sure that the signal has a clear "line of sight," which means there are no trees or tall buildings in the way that could interrupt the signal between the truck and the station. Even a good signal has an effective range of only around 60 miles, and it can also be disrupted by high winds or rain.

A more sophisticated process is the use of a satellite truck. The truck bounces the signal off an orbiting satellite, which sends it back down to the station. There is no limit to its range, but engineers must have the exact satellite coordinates to download the signal. Because of the expense of buying satellite time, stations usually only have a limited window in which to do their transmissions. As with microwave transmission, unforeseen problems can interrupt or erode a satellite signal.



Figure 1.4 Producers Depend on the Engineering Department to Keep Equipment Working Properly, Especially Satellite Feeds

SOURCE: Photograph by Brad Schultz.

No matter what type of transmission is involved, producers must work with the engineering department to coordinate live coverage. Producers must be especially aware of time restrictions and requirements, satellite coordinates, and geographic realities that may affect live coverage capability. Technology has made live reporting easier and more common, but there are still engineering considerations that must be taken into account.

SPORTS AND WEATHER

Sports and weather have their own departments, but the producer still has control over these segments within the newscast. This relationship can cause a lot of problems for everyone involved. Sports and weather people naturally want to control their own segments, but the producer has the power to change or influence them in relation to the overall newscast.

For the most part, weather and sports people produce their own material. The newscast producer gives them freedom in this regard, particularly



Figure 1.5 The Sports Department Produces Its Own Material but Must Coordinate Closely With News Producers

SOURCE: Photograph by Brad Schultz.

when it comes to content. However, there are certain limits, the most obvious of which is time. The producer tightly controls the time allotted for both segments. Weather usually gets more time (3 minutes or more) because it generates a great deal of audience interest, especially during bad or threatening weather. Fewer people have an interest in sports, which comes at the end of the newscast and gets less time (around 2 minutes, but this is shrinking in many markets). In rare circumstances, such as breaking news or election night, the sports segment can be dropped entirely. On the other side, either segment can get more time in cases when audience interest would be higher, such as for coverage of a local championship game.

Dropping sports entirely is an extreme example of how the producer can influence these segments of the newscast. There are much more subtle influences, such as having weather or sports go live from a particular venue. In situations where weather or sports become the dominant story of the day, the news department can co-opt the story. For example, if a prominent sports figure in the community were arrested, that would probably lead the news segment. The producer and sports department would need to discuss and coordinate plans for covering the story.

Many sports and weather departments complain that in such situations, the producer is not leaving them any material for their own segments. The best course of action is fully coordinated coverage involving the producer, news director, and sports or weather departments. This can help lay out exactly what each one will contribute to the newscast. In situations where the conflict is harder to resolve, the producer and news director have ultimate authority to determine the shape of the newscast.

For more details about sports and weather segments within the newscast, see chapter 6.

THE TRAFFIC DEPARTMENT

The traffic department at the station has the responsibility of keeping track of everything that runs on the air. Stations keep a log of every program and every commercial, and the traffic department has to make sure that they all run at their assigned times. In a sense, it is the “traffic cop” of the station’s programming.

Producers must look at the station log to determine such things as commercial breaks and the length of the news hole. In a half-hour television newscast, stations will typically devote 8 minutes to commercials (often in the form of four 2-minute breaks). The time that is left over, minus time for the standard opening and closing shots and credits, is the news hole. That is the amount of news content a producer has to organize. Once sports and weather are factored in, the news hole runs about 12 to 15 minutes in a half-hour show.

Producers must pay special attention to commercial breaks, because commercials are what make money for the station. In a very practical sense, the show exists only to give advertisers a way to reach the audience. Advertisers are paying not only for their commercial but for a specific time within the newscast. A company selling snow blowers, for example, expects its commercial to run as close to the weather segment as possible. Part of the job of producing is making sure that all the ads in the show run, and at their assigned times.

Except in very rare cases, producers cannot drop, shorten, or switch commercials. Failure to get a commercial on the air means that the station will have to offer the advertiser a make-good, which is essentially free air time for the ad. If the producer needs to adjust time in the show, it can be done by adjusting the time of the news hole—lengthening or shortening certain segments (such as sports or weather) or dropping individual stories. If the show comes up short in time, public service announcements (PSAs) can be added. PSAs are unpaid promotions for government or charitable causes, such as antidrug messages.

Of course, there are certain extraordinary situations in which a producer might drop commercials from a newscast, such as in the case

of extremely urgent breaking news. During the September 11 terrorist attacks, for example, most of the major networks ran their coverage commercial-free (at a cost of millions of dollars in ad revenue). But even in this situation, the decision to drop advertising usually comes from the news director or station manager. In short, a producer should seldom drop ads from a newscast and should only do so upon consultation with station management.

THE SALES DEPARTMENT

By now, it should be apparent how important advertising is to the newscast and to the station as a whole. The sales department has the responsibility of selling station air time to local and national advertisers—still the main source of revenue for most broadcast stations. Because the local newscast is often the station's most visible and successful program, advertising within it is highly desirable and fairly expensive. Exact advertising rates are determined by a variety of factors, most particularly the audience ratings for the show.

In theory, the sales department should have little say in news department affairs or in the content of a newscast. However, advertising within the newscast is a major revenue source, and sales executives want to make news advertisers happy. In some cases, the sales department will suggest certain types of news content to match advertiser needs. For example, during the summer, many television stations arrange to do a cookout from a viewer's backyard as part of the weather segment. Naturally, a hardware store or barbeque grill company would find this an attractive way to advertise.

The increasing cost of producing news has made this type of arrangement very common. But even in the case of a fairly harmless backyard cookout, it raises questions of conflict of interest. This can become a serious issue when the sales department tries to protect advertisers from unflattering news coverage. A local hospital that spends lots of advertising money in the newscast certainly does not want to see the station run an investigative story about the hospital's safety record. It is not unheard of for sales executives to try and protect their clients in such situations by suggesting less damaging news coverage.

Sometimes this can turn into a power struggle between the sales and news departments, and in such cases, producers should do everything possible to protect the integrity of the newscast. This becomes even more difficult as the line between news content and advertising continues to blur. In situations where a major conflict arises, producers should not try to carry the fight alone. When the sales and news departments collide, the news director and station manager will ultimately have the last say.

STUDIO PERSONNEL

Weather and sports will produce their own contributions to the newscast, and reporters take up a certain amount of time with their stories. But it is up to the producer to fill the rest of the newscast with other material, which is typically a combination of national, regional, and general interest items. The producer is responsible for writing, editing, and getting these stories ready for the air.

Fortunately, the producer can usually count on studio help to get this done, as most stations have a staff dedicated to this purpose. It can be composed of full-time staff or strictly volunteer personnel, but its main job is to help the producer fill the news hole. This includes such things as editing stories, logging and describing news feeds, communicating with other news staff, and studio camera work. The studio crew will do a variety of jobs to help put the show together, but the actual writing of news stories is left to producers or other professional news staff.

Some stations have editors and writers whose sole responsibility is to perform these functions. Tape editors do nothing all day but edit stories on tape for presentation in the newscast. Generally, only the larger markets and stations can afford these positions on a consistent basis. It is also worth noting that many of these support positions are filled by members of unions. In these situations, producers and other nonunion members are forbidden from doing the jobs themselves.

In some very small markets, the producer may not get much help in getting these jobs done. As a practical matter, that is why it is important for producers to get experience in these areas. Most news directors would prefer to have studio crew members available, however, so the producer can be free to concentrate on the newscast.

OTHER STATION DEPARTMENTS

Some stations have a promotion department, which tries to advertise or promote the newscast and increase its audience. Such promotion could take the form of billboards, mailings, personal appearances, and the like.

The promotions department might ask the news department to cover certain stories in an effort to maximize publicity. For example, many stations will go on the road and do their newscasts on location in different areas. The location could be a business, a planned activity, or a small town within the station's broadcast range. The sales department might also get involved, as this usually attracts advertisers in the area. The producer might work together with members of the promotion department to coordinate news coverage.

There are other departments at the station that have little or no effect on the producer. For example, the general administration department

(GA) is the bookkeeping part of the station, responsible for financial matters such as accounts payable, accounts receivable, inventory, and group health and insurance plans. Depending on the size of the station, it may include a human resources or personnel department in charge of hiring and firing.

Again, these departments are mentioned only within the context of the overall station, and they have very little impact on how a producer goes about his or her job. However, producers certainly have an interest in the general administration department when it comes to health insurance, getting enough newsroom supplies, and especially on payday.

What Else Does a Producer Do?

You should be able to see the relationship between the producer and other departments at the station. In the course of putting together a newscast, the producer constantly interacts with a variety of station personnel. Much of the success of a newscast depends on the relationship between the producer and these other people and how well the producer maintains that relationship. In addition to these important relationships, there are many things the producer does with little or no outside influence.

Primarily, the producer is a *content organizer*. This is the main job of a producer—getting the newscast organized, put together, and on the air. Other personnel and departments will contribute their input to the show, but the ultimate responsibility rests with the producer.

As we have already seen, the producer is a *staff overseer*. The position of producer is part managerial, in that producers do have authority over other newsroom personnel, including anchors, reporters, and photographers. Producers must be able to exercise that authority to get a newscast on the air. Obviously, no one likes being told what to do, and the best producers view their authority as more of a shared communication process. However, when the hard decisions must be made, producers must exercise control over their newscasts and their personnel.

Perhaps it is better to think of the producer as a *department coordinator*. You have seen the variety of departments that have some sort of stake in the newscast. A good producer works with these departments and coordinates their input into the newscast. Many times, a newscast will fail simply because the producer did not take these various inputs into account.

The producer also has a direct responsibility to the news director, and thus serves as a *management liaison*. As such, he or she is a communication link between the news director and the rest of the newsroom. Generally, when problems associated with the newscast occur, reporters and other

personnel go the producer first. Only if the producer cannot resolve the problem does the news director get involved. The process also works the other way, in that the news director can work through the producer to filter information to other news personnel. Either way, the producer is considered a link in the chain of command that must be respected.

Although most of the producer's day is filled up with getting a newscast on the air, he or she must also be a *long-range planner*. We have already noted how producers work with the news director and other station management on long-range projects. This also emphasizes the unique role of the producer—part management and part labor. The producer is much like other newsroom personnel when it comes to writing, editing, and putting a show together. But the producer also serves a management function that comes with much more authority.

The career of Mike McHugh shows how many different things a producer has to do. McHugh worked his way up from a small television station in Bluefield, West Virginia (market size 149), to assistant news director at WBBM-TV in Chicago (market three), where he also served as executive producer on the 10:00 p.m. news (Table 1.1). Note that as McHugh's career progressed, his responsibilities shifted away from the actual production of news and more into management activities such as budgeting and planning.

The Producer's Role in the Newsroom

The roles and responsibilities we have discussed apply to almost all producers, regardless of where or for whom they work. But there are other factors that vary from station to station and market to market, and these factors can make the producer's role in the newsroom much different.

The *size of the news operation* often dictates a producer's exact responsibilities. Smaller newsrooms do not have as much support personnel, and producers will have a bigger share of getting the newscast on the air. This includes such things as writing, editing, and maybe even some reporting or anchoring. In many smaller television markets, one person will produce and anchor the newscast. This is becoming more common even in larger markets, as stations look for ways to reduce the growing cost of news.

More often, however, larger markets will have more support personnel, and the producer will have a more specialized role. Some stations have an extra layer in their management structure for an executive producer (EP), who oversees the producer. The EP is more like an assistant news director and works together with the producer to put the show together.

Table 1.1 News Producing: Mike McHugh

1984-1985	<p>Producer and Anchor, WVVA-TV, Bluefield, WV</p> <p>Produced and anchored 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. nightly newscasts.</p>
1985-1987	<p>Executive Producer and Producer, WTHI-TV, Terre Haute, IN</p> <p>Produced 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. nightly newscasts.</p>
1987-1994	<p>Executive Producer, WISN-TV, Milwaukee, WI</p> <p>Responsible for planning, editorial oversight, special projects, series, and sports department for number 1-rated news station. Duties included evaluating personnel, hiring, and budgeting. Promoted from 6:00 p.m. news producer.</p>
1994-1996	<p>Assistant News Director, WTAE-TV, Pittsburgh, PA</p> <p>Senior newsroom manager, responsible for editorial oversight, development and implementation of news "brand" at top-rated news station. Responsibilities included the management of all newsroom personnel. Duties included hiring, research analysis, ratings strategy, all news content, and series planning and production.</p>
1996-2000	<p>Executive Producer, WBBM-TV, Chicago, IL</p> <p>Senior News Manager, responsible for editorial control and production of daily news program. Executed station management's vision of redefined broadcast (worked with four news directors in 4 years). Supervised producer, writers, reporters, and anchors to deliver product consistent with station's goal. Responsible for daily content and story development.</p>
2000-2002	<p>Assistant News Director, WBBM-TV, Chicago, IL</p> <p>Senior-level news manager, responsible for all news gathering, operations, and management of 130 news personnel. Wrote staff policies for editorial and administrative concerns. Coordinated all operational systems relating to news-gathering technology. Worked closely with corporate legal and human resources personnel. Managed nonunion and union employees through contract implementation, personnel reviews, and accountability procedures. Fiscal responsibilities included creating all news project budgets and developing systems for newsroom overtime and outside vendor expense tracking. Recruited news personnel. Served as station representative in CBS national negotiations with IBEW. Selected for the national developmental team to digitize <i>CBS Newspath</i>.</p>

SOURCE: Mike McHugh (personal communication, March 2003).

Comparing a large-market station and a small-market station shows how station size can influence the role of the producer (see Table 1.2). WBBM-TV in Chicago is part of the third-largest market in the United States and has a very large news staff. Not only does the station list at least 19 producers, many of these producers have specialized positions. There is a senior producer, for example, in charge of special projects. This is a position not involved with producing on a daily basis but more concerned with occasional programming.

By contrast, WTVA-TV is in Tupelo, Mississippi, the country's 131st market. WTVA has only four producers, and most of them must also work in some other capacity, such as anchor or photographer. There is also not the same level of support staff, which would suggest that producers at the station have to do much more in terms of actually getting the newscast on the air.

The producer's responsibilities also depend on the *style of the news director*. Some news directors, especially those at smaller stations, take a very hands-on approach to the newscast. They want to get very involved in the production process, sometimes to the point of micromanagement. In these cases, the producer can have very little to do other than standing around and helping out where needed. However, it is much more common for news directors to take more of a hands-off approach and delegate authority to the producer. The news director might pitch in when the situation warrants, especially in the case of breaking news, but more often he or she will let the producer do the heavy lifting. It goes without saying that news directors can be hands-on, hands-off, or anywhere in between. This is something that producers generally learn on the job, when they sit down and actually start putting a show together.

It should also be obvious that what a producer does, and the kind of show that can be put together, depend a lot on the station's *available resources*. Every station has a different level of resources committed to the news product. Often, this is directly related to station size—the larger the station, the more resources available. But this is not always the case. Many smaller stations have a tremendous investment in news production, including such things as state-of-the-art ENG equipment, satellite trucks, and live vans. Resources are not limited to equipment, and many smaller stations have invested in human resources, such as more reporters, photographers, and so on.

The resources a station commits to news have a direct bearing on a producer's job. It is unreasonable to expect a producer to put together a newscast with lots of sophisticated graphics if the station does not have the necessary equipment. It could be something as simple as computer producing software or something complex, such as a new satellite truck. The escalating cost of news has led many stations to reduce the resources dedicated to news production—a major source of frustration for most producers. But whatever the level of resources at a station, the producer can only work within those limits.

Table 1.2 How Producer Responsibility Varies by Station Size

<i>Typical Large-Market News Staff, WBBM-TV, Chicago, Illinois, 2003</i>	
Carol Fowler	News Director
Todd Woolman	Assistant News Director
Scott Keenan	Managing Editor
Ed Marshall	Executive Producer of Special Projects
Karin Movesian	Executive Producer, <i>CBS 2 News This Morning</i>
Jill Manuel	Executive Producer, <i>CBS 2 News Weekend</i>
Julie Eich	Executive Producer, <i>CBS 2 News</i> , 10 p.m.
Christopher Selfridge	Executive Producer, <i>CBS 2 News</i> , 11 a.m., 4:30 p.m., 5:00 p.m.
Deidra White	Manager of Recruitment and Staff Development
Marda LeBeau	Senior Producer of Special Projects
Elizabeth Johnson	Producer, <i>CBS 2 News This Morning</i>
Cynthia Knox	Producer, <i>CBS 2 News This Morning</i>
Tracy O'Brien	Producer, <i>CBS 2 News</i> , 11:00 a.m.
Regina Griffin	Producer, <i>CBS 2 News</i> , 4:30 p.m.
Beth Fruehling	Producer, <i>CBS 2 News</i> , 5:00 p.m.
Traci Fitzmorris	Producer, <i>CBS 2 News</i> , 10:00 p.m.
Sue Brown	Producer, <i>Saturday, Sunday Evening News</i> Producer, <i>Sunday 10:00 p.m. News</i>
Laura Meehan	Producer, <i>On Call with Dr. Breen</i>
Greg Kelly	Dayside Assignment Editor
Kevin Kraus	Evening Assignment Editor
Chastity Parker	Weekend Assignment Editor
Rob Holliday	Weekend Assignment Editor
Chris Boden	Sports Producer
Norm Potash	Sports Producer

(Continued)

Table 1.2 (Continued)

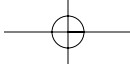
Steve Goldberg	Sports Producer
Lissa Druss	Senior Sports Producer
Pam Zekman	Investigative unit
Simone Thiessen	Investigative unit
Ann Marie Pagan	Satellite Coordinator
Mike Adamle	Sports Anchor, Reporter
Michael Ayala	News Anchor, Reporter
Chris Boden	Sports Reporter, Producer
Michael Breen, MD	Chief Medical Reporter
Markina Brown	Weather Anchor, Reporter
Mary Ann Childers	News Anchor, Reporter
John Davis	News Anchor, Reporter
Stacia Dubin	Reporter
Mike Flannery	Political Editor
Vince Gerasole	News Anchor, Reporter
Kris Habermehl	"Chopper 2" (helicopter reporter)
Chris Hernandez	Reporter
Kyung Lah	Reporter
Steve Lattimore	Reporter
Suzanne Le Mignot	Reporter
Jay Levine	CBS 2 Chief Correspondent
Linda MacLennan	News Anchor
Antonio Mora	News Anchor
Carolyn D. Murray	CBS 2 Consumer Reporter
Mike Parker	Reporter
Cynthia Santana	News Anchor, Reporter
Howard Sudberry	Sports Anchor, Reporter

Tracy Townsend	News Anchor, Reporter
Dorothy Tucker	Reporter
Monty Webb	Meteorologist
Pam Zekman	Investigative Reporter
<i>Small-Market News Staff, WTVA-TV, Tupelo, Mississippi, 2004</i>	
Terry Smith	News Director
Producers	Three full-time
Assignment Editor	One full-time
Reporters and videographers	Seven full-time
News staff	Same person may at one time or another be producer, on-air talent, reporter, editor, sports (or may do several of these jobs simultaneously)

SOURCE: CBS 2 Chicago (2004); Terry Smith (personal communication, March 5, 2004).

Thinking More About It

1. Contact or visit a local broadcast station and talk with one of the news producers. If possible, try to find out the following:
 - a. What do you do during the day?
 - b. How much of your day is spent writing? Planning? Overseeing newsroom personnel?
 - c. What is the organizational structure at the station? Who is the news director? The station manager? Does your station have an executive producer?
 - d. Do you like what you do? What is the most difficult part? The most satisfying?
2. Research broadcast stations on the Internet by typing the station call letters into a search engine. Find out what you can about the station news department, including the names and duties of the station manager, news director, and producers. Do most stations have the same type of organizational structure, or does it vary from station to station? Does the news section of the website give any indication of what the producer does or what part he or she plays in the newscast? Is there a way to contact the producer directly, via e-mail or phone?



3. Watch a television newscast or listen to a radio newscast in your area.
 - a. Is there a clear delineation between news and commercials? Is it possible to tell how much influence the sales department has in news presentation? Are there areas or stories that seem more like commercials than news? What specific stories can you find that suggest the influence of the sales department?
 - b. What specific stories indicate a level of cooperation between the news department and other station departments, such as engineering or weather? How frequent is this coordination in the newscast?
 - c. Did it seem like a good newscast that was worth watching, or did you get bored and want to tune into another station? Do you think the news producer did a good job? Why?

