

manager of WBTV(TV) Charlotte, N.C., says he's "almost evangelistic" about another system, from co-owned Jefferson Data Systems, that's in use at WBTV. "The newsroom is crazy about it," he says. And the consensus seems to be that electronic newsrooms will become a genuine trend within a few years (see story, page 88).

While they're waiting to be made paperless by the computer, newsrooms and the way they do business have been changed in many ways by other new equipment. ENG, satellites and helicopters in particular are expanding horizons to wherever the story is. And stations in more and more instances are providing coverage that used to be left to the networks—or could only have been done by networks.

The dozen or so stations that used satellites to send back coverage of their local and state delegations represented one of the major media stores of this year's Republican and Democratic national conventions. And although it's by no means an every-day or every-station affair, the practice of sending news teams abroad occurs much more frequently than it used to. Examples: A KSL-TV team recently completed a 15-day trip to the Far East, covering a tour by leaders of the Mormon Church (and picking up sidebar reports along the way). KRON(TV) San Francisco sent a team to Japan during the September week when *Shogun* was running up ratings on NBC. And WTAE(TV) Pittsburgh is one of those that plan to send crews to Europe when Iran releases the American hostages.

On a more modest scale, the move to

get more reporting from the field has been apparent for some time, in small as well as large markets, but helicopters have enlarged both the range and the extent. Stations are using helicopters to get crews to news events in areas beyond the range of ground transportation and, when the craft are equipped for live transmission, they're using them as communications satellites to send back land-based coverage.

Typical examples:

Jim Hefner, assistant news director of WRAL-TV Raleigh, N.C., says that during the closing two weeks of last month's murder trial of six Ku Klux Klan and Nazi party members at Greensboro, N.C., 80 miles away, WRAL-TV used its helicopter to relay reports from the courthouse nightly for live inserts in the station's 6 p.m. newscast. WRAL-TV has had the helicopter for a year and a half, Hefner says, and uses it daily, both for transportation and for coverage. "It's hard to cover a news conference from a helicopter," he says, "but it can cover a drought nicely."

Bob Howick, news director of WPTV(TV) West Palm Beach, Fla., finds his station's helicopter, acquired in August, a boon for covering events in and around the state's swamplands. "We use it," says Howick, "to reach and cover areas that we couldn't reach by ground transportation, or couldn't have reached in time to get back for the evening news. A helicopter is one of the better tools, especially in areas like this."

Bob Feldman, assistant news director of WPVI-TV Philadelphia, says his station's

newsmen regularly send back live reports from distances of 70 to 80 miles, using their helicopter as "a floating relay station."

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While aircraft are expanding the range and speed of coverage, many stations are expanding the amount of time given news departments to fill.

Some are lengthening their early-evening newscasts, as WTAE(TV) Pittsburgh plans to do, going to an hour from a half-hour within "the next few weeks," because, as news director Joe Rovitto puts it, "we've just got so much stuff, and we think good stuff, that we need the extra time."

Some are producing for access periods, and although this is currently happening mostly in major markets, many feel the trend will make headway into other markets—if only because, as ABC's Peter Jacobus puts it, "syndicated entertainment programming is so expensive." Others are producing magazine type shows for other periods, like WQAD-TV Moline, which news director Bille says is turning out a half-hour magazine show seven days a week, leading into the evening news. Still others are accelerating their output of occasional documentaries and specials.

Stations also are fine-tuning their output. Some have hired professionals in other fields to provide expert reports. KENS-TV San Antonio, Tex., for example, is one of those with a medical doctor on staff—or was, according to news director Bob Rogers, until the Cable News Network hired him away. (Rogers says the local medical society, which originally opposed KENS-TV's hiring of the doctor, is now urging—and helping—him to find a replacement doctor.)

Many more are relying on their own reporters, assigning them to specific fields, such as health and medicine, energy, the economy, the environment, recreation and leisure, telling them to cover these fields the way they used to cover city hall. The net result is that on many stations there is, in Michael Bille's words, "hardly a newscast without some kind of report for consumers."

Investigative reporting is still on the rise, with stations sending out teams ranging from one reporter to a half-dozen or more, and increasingly they're aiming their probes at substantial targets—what WTAE's Rovitto calls "something besides ground beef." And by most accounts the quality of reporting is improving at all levels.

What it boils down to is that serious newsrooms across the country are making serious efforts to tell their viewers what they need to know, want to know or would like to know—and to do it as professionally as they can and as fully as TV's time constraints will allow. They have a lot of sophisticated gadgetry and they're using it, but for the most part they are using it to improve content, not as a substitute. They don't succeed every time or in every case. But they're getting better at it.



Enter INN. A regularly scheduled prime-time newscast still may be a TV pipedream for those in the journalistic ranks at ABC, CBS and NBC. But for the independent-TV sector, the breakthrough came on June 9, with 27 affiliates airing WPXI(TV) New York's Monday-through-Friday half-hour Independent Network News. With it, local anchors (above l-r) Pat Harper, Steve Bosh and Bill Jergenson went national.

During the first weekend in October, Saturday and Sunday feeds were added and by last week, INN counted 40 affiliates and was verging on clearance of 60% of the country. Of the top-10 markets, all but Cleveland are represented. Costs for the start-up year—production, staff, news services, satellite time and all else making up a daily national and international news broadcast—are expected to run some \$5-6 million.

A "surprise," according to John Corporan, WPXI vice president for news and INN executive producer, "is that we expanded faster than we thought." Still more expansion may be in store. Now being explored is the possibility of a midday report that could begin in January. Feelers are being put out to affiliates.

With INN, Corporan makes no claims of being able to do one better than the networks; he hasn't anywhere near the resources of an ABC, CBS or NBC. What is offered is a TV news broadcast "where [network] news didn't exist before"—in prime time with most INN affiliates airing the feed at 10 p.m. (NYT).