

Positioning in Christian Research

The New Piece

How we get information needed for important decisions

2 POLLING

Gallup, Pew and Barna and others publish extensive polling data on the religious landscape and condition of churches.

However, polling has become increasingly difficult, less nuanced, and less statistically reliable because people are replacing landlines with cell phones. A high percentage of people won't fill out a form or talk to a survey taker, and they won't give the time necessary for probing in depth.

Value is limited because responses are forced into rigid categories and stripped of all personality, emotion and reasoning.

Polling data usually tells WHAT in broad categories, but not much about WHY or what to DO about it.

3 COMMENTARY

There's no end of articles in print and on screen with statistics and opinions regarding the shrinking church in America.

Mostly, writers just restate what they've heard from other writers. Thoughts from the minds of ordinary people are filtered through layers of observers and analysts – often biased in order to make a point – and then reported only from third-party perspective.

Also, some valuable information is gathered as direct quotes from occasional focus groups, but they are often skewed by selection and setting, and strongly influenced by the biases and skills of the facilitator.

Commentary is often a distortion of pure research, frequently misleading in order to justify a particular point of view.



1 INTERNAL DATA

Churches keep their own records on attendance, income and other metrics.

Leaders know what's happening in their own church – and sometimes share some data with other churches, denominations and media – but understanding is narrow and superficial.

86% of Twin Cities churches are stalled or declining, but their data doesn't tell them WHY or what to DO about it.

4 NEW: STREET INTERVIEWS

In the overall scheme of Christian research, this is the piece that's been missing, but now taking form at the ministry described at www.streetinterviews.org.

To truly understand modern culture, we need to hear from people directly ... at random on the street ... in their own words and manner ... nothing edited or omitted ... just raw thinking spilling out of their minds extemporaneously ... probing for greater depth, experiences and reasons.

About half of communication is actual **words** used, and the other half is **tone** (attitude intensity, emphasis) and **body language** (facial, gestures, eyes, touch, use of space), which the other three forms of research miss completely.

This is raw, visceral research at the most basic level. It's the most trustworthy research because it can be emotionally seen and heard, without peer pressure.

It's the most actionable kind of research because it tells WHY in detail and gives strong signals regarding what to DO about it.

Because pastors and church leaders spend so much time at church and with Christian people, and are tied to tradition, they're often the most insulated from the raw everyday thinking of ordinary people, particularly young people. People talk to clergy differently than they talk to each other ... nicer, usually saying what they think the pastor would like to hear, restrained in what they're really thinking.

Listening to each new batch of Street Interviews can be of great value to pastors and church leaders for keeping current with modern culture ... for programming, evaluation, sermon preparation, teaching, evangelism, counseling and personal effectiveness.