

**Know Your Church; Know Your Mission Field**

**Tom Carringer and Clay Smith, Speakers**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 013**

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome back to Columbia Metro Connection, a podcast where you can go to get valuable, relevant, and quality resources for you and your congregation. The Columbia Metro Connection is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the almost 100 partner churches that support the Ministry of the CMBA.

 This week, we have a special sponsor in the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, the director of missions, strategic leadership coach and lead missiologist at the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and I'm Chris Reinolds, lead pastor at Killian Baptist Church.

 Joining us this week is Tom Carringer, demographic and psychographic researcher and Clay Smith, lead pastor at Alice Drive Baptist Church in Sumpter, South Carolina. Together they'll share with us the importance of the 30,000 foot view of demographics and the 10,000 foot view of psychographic and lifestyle data and how that information can be used as a catalyst to help your church connect with the households in your context.

George Bullard: Well, Tom and Clay, thank you so much for being with us today. You know, it was my desire to have you all on this podcast because of the unique information I believe that you all have to share with our Columbia Metro Baptist Association churches. We are very interested in our churches connecting deeply with the lifestyle groups in their community context that is in their draw area. And so we're excited about the conference that you've come to help us lead today, but we're excited also about the information and sharing it through this podcast medium.

Chris Reinolds: Now, Tom, a lot of people, they're familiar with demographic data, but for those listeners that are not, could you give us a little, sort of like a two minute briefing that would highlight the information that demographics provide and its value to the local church?

Tom Carringer: Oh, sure. Well, Chris, you know, when you first think about demographic, demographic mostly has to do with people and so when you think about demographic information, what you're doing is just looking at people.

 And a lot of times we think of people as far as population and definitely there's population and there's race, but demographic can be anything from what kind of peanut butter do they like? And so now it's just better understanding your community and so now it's looking at your community of which your church is in and now understanding the context of your church from a community viewpoint instead of from a church viewpoint.

 And so demographics is really a 30,000 foot view of looking at what's in your broader community. There's certainly ways we can go deeper with that.

George Bullard: Well, Tom, obviously while demographic data provides us with the surface level characteristics, to what extent is it possible to go deeper that will move into psychographic or lifestyle kind of information?

Tom Carringer: So you know, when I think of demographic, demographic is just about people. When I think about lifestyle segmentation or psychographic, what that does is it tells us what types of people and it's actually based on behaviors in that what these companies have done, they've put about a billion purchasing transactions against demographic data to begin measuring behaviors and a lot of times what we tend to do is we try to build affinities and a lot of times we build the wrong affinities. We come up with the wrong assumptions because it's not based on behaviors, it's based on what we think or what we feel. Psychographic information, what it does, is it helps you come up with what their affinities are because it's this whole idea of birds of a feather really do flock together.

Chris Reinolds: So the psychographic data that you're providing and that you're gathering, it's broken down into like 19 different groups, but aren't there anywhere from three to seven variations in each one of those groups?

Tom Carringer: Yes, Chris. There certainly are. Depending on the group, yes, there's three to seven different segments within that group. And so, one of the things that's interesting is like one of the groups here in the Columbia Metro area, it's Group D, and I'm not going to tell you the name of the group, but it's a group. But then one of the segments in that group, and these are young professional business people that primarily make up this group, but one of the segments in that group is 99.9% African American, so it distinguishes itself and it's just a finer definition of what that overall group is or that overall affinity is and so it helps you better define what's in your area. And so you can really get information by looking at the group, but if you really want to go in depth, then you start looking at the segments within each of those groups and it can really give you just a really good understanding of what's taking place in your community.

Chris Reinolds: Just a point of clarification. These churches that are receiving this information, that's a lot of information to process through. I mean, how do they even begin to ... all of those various segments and breakdowns, and how did they begin to process through that when I'm sure it's like drinking water out of a fire hydrant?

Tom Carringer: It certainly can be, Chris. In fact, what happens is if you ever heard the expression, "Water water everywhere and not a drop to drink?"

Chris Reinolds: Yes.

Tom Carringer: And so now what you can begin doing is, what you’ve got to do is you’ve got to signal out all the noise and get to the real signal. And I know that George oftentimes talks about what types of ponds are you fishing in. And I use that analogy a lot as well.

Chris Reinolds: It's a good one.

Tom Carringer: When you go into an area, what happens is, is you might have one group that has been established there, but a new group that is moving in. And so it's understanding the groups that's been there and the groups that's moving in and see how they're alike or how they're different. And now what you can begin doing is you can begin looking at signal and you're only focused on a small section of what the population is, especially when you start looking at the inside of your church.

 And so now it's a matter of what type of pond do you want to fish in or what type of pond is your church good at? What kind of fish is your church good at catching?

George Bullard: Well you know, Tom, I've always found over the years too that when a new house or housing development is going up in the city or in a suburban area, it's pretty obvious for you to see with your eyes who's moving in there, but once housing is established and there's just the regular trading around of who's living in what houses, we don't see that much anymore.

 And so the psychographics and lifestyle segmentation I find really helps with that kind of thing. But also, I would say for the person that's trying to get a start on it, if they don't have the data yet, you go to your elementary school and see what's happening in the elementary school, because that's where you're going to see some of the first changes in the lifestyle segmentation of your community area.

Chris Reinolds: That really does make sense. How do you, with the increased amount of apartment complexes, especially in the Columbia area that have come up, you don't have just one specific demographic in that. You could have a ton of different demographics in that one particular setting. How do you process through data like that?

Tom Carringer: So I cannot process through data like that. In fact, what happens is, is what you're trying to do is a lot of times, people try to get way too deep. And you're just wanting to get enough to where you can get some signal to make a decision.

 And so now how much is enough to make, you know, to get the right signal to make a decision? Now, when you start talking about apartment complexes in this type of thing, it's amazing now how much ... in fact, these segmentation systems, they can now take it down to the individual household. In fact, the segmentation system that we're currently using is Mosaic. It's owned by Experian, which is one of your top credit reporting bureaus. And so what they are able to do is they're actually able to take it down to the individual household.

 What we have is we have the nine digit zip code rendering of that, and a nine digit zip code could be one floor of that apartment complex. And what it would do is it would give us the dominant group within that nine digit zip code. Most of the households within a nine digit zip code are all the same. And that's the reason that we've used a nine digit zip code is because of, you know, in a suburban area, a nine digit zip code is one side of the road, corner to corner, typically. And so now most of those houses, they're like people in those houses. There can be exceptions, but now when you look at it from a church viewpoint, now it gives you enough signal before you make a decision.

George Bullard: Right. Well, you know Tom, that's interesting how that works. The nine digit zip code in my own home. Lots of times when I'm sending out something handwritten as a return address, I'll put “Bullard” and then my nine digit zip code, and I realize that's all I need because the post office will find it, right exactly my house. I'm the only Bullard in that nine digit zip code in terms of what happens. But Tom, let me switch here a minute and now let's talk about specific kinds of church situations.

 You've worked with Clay Smith, who we have here today, and Alice Drive Baptist Church. Can you tell us a little bit about how this lifestyle segmentation data is pertinent to Alice Drive Baptist Church?

Tom Carringer: I certainly can, George. It's been my pleasure to work with Clay a couple of times. Clay I have worked closely together now for more than 10 years. And so, when we look at a church like Alice Drive, now what we can do is we can take this data and now we can look and see what's in the community and then we can use the same data to look and see what's in the church.

 And so now you can begin comparing those two things. And as you began comparing those two things, what you can see is you can see the people that you're really good at reaching or who's really receptive to your message and the ones that are not so receptive to your message.

 In fact, one of the things that we found out with Clay's church and Alice Drive is some of the dominant groups that are in their community, they are not reaching at all. And some of the groups that are not as strong in their community, they're doing a very good job reaching. In fact, there's one group, that's a little bit unusual at Alice Drive, in that Alice Drive is reaching over 25% of the households that's within this particular group.

 And you know, what that says is they may have over 25% penetration of reaching those people that actually within the last three years, somebody has taken an intentional step at Alice Drive Baptist Church that fits within that group. And so now you can begin seeing it and you can begin understanding and so you can begin knowing now what it is, what's God's unique plan for your church and how God has uniquely gifted you as far as the type people that you're reaching. And then it allows you not only to be very good at that, but to partner with other churches that might be better at reaching these other people. And so now it gives you some differentiation of what you can be good at and what you can do as working with other churches.

Chris Reinolds: Well Clay, since on your side of things, you've been the recipient of a study like this, what pushed your church to see the need for, to get such an extensive report and sort of how have you been using that information since receiving the study?

Clay Smith: Chris, originally we had hit a barrier. A growth barrier. I had been pastor of the church about 10 years, 12 years when Tom first came and worked with us in 2006 and the first 10 years were an amazing rocket ride. We were just, if you're a warm body, you're welcome at Alice Drive and then we got to a certain level and then we weren't growing and I could not figure out why.

 And I had a lot of voices coming to me saying, well, you need to do this or you need to try this. And we read a lot of different stuff out in the church press, if you will, that was saying, “This is the strategy you need to pursue.” Well, the benefit of Tom coming in is he helped us define who we are good at reaching. And we were surprised.

 It really changed the way we saw ourselves because we thought we were good at reaching this particular segment of population. And we found out we were actually much better at reaching another segment of population. Tom also helped us realize that we, by God's grace, had been able to fish in a lot of different ponds. The value of bringing Tom back then 11 years later was to see if we had changed.

 In our particular context, we had not changed that much. And the demographics around us had not changed that much, but Tom identified something for us that's very important, that our population is declining. That sets our expectations differently. And how are we going to deal with this? There's still lots of people who need to know Jesus around us. But we can't just rely on an influx of people to grow our church.

 Now, how do we use that data? And I want to kind of give everybody a peace ... We don't pull this data out at every meeting. We don't pull this data out at every ... I don't look at it daily. What we have found is the most helpful thing is it gives us facts to interact with, and that helps us make decisions. So we're not just chasing the latest church fad. We're not just responding to somebody in a completely different cultural context than us. What they have found works for them, we're not assuming that it works for us, so it's this wonderful filter.

 It helps us know not just who we're good at reaching, but who we're not good at reaching. Tom described a large demographic we have in our community and we don't penetrate them at all. To actually reach that group, we would have to change everything about our church and we would alienate everybody who's there. And I believe that God gives every church a specific, distinct mission. And so we need to support and encourage every church in their distinct mission. What that has helped us do is actually partner with some other churches and say, "Hey, you're really good at reaching these people. Let us help you. Let us mentor. We can come alongside you." And that's been a wonderful experience for us.

Chris Reinolds: That takes a lot of setting aside of pride and that sort of mine sort of mentality whenever it comes to, you know, doing something like that is working with other churches and saying, "Hey, you're going to be better at reaching these people group than we are."

Clay Smith: Absolutely.

Chris Reinolds: That's great.

George Bullard: Well, Clay, I'd be interested to know how your church received the information and if there were surprises and even if there was resistance to targeting and focusing once you understood who you were best gifted, skilled in preference to reach?

Clay Smith: We felt like this information was best utilized by our staff and by our core lay leadership. So, we did not distribute that information to the church as a whole. But what we did do, as we started first processing it as a staff is we found out that we had staff people just to be very honest, who didn't want to see the truth.

 They were a little bit like Jack Nicholson in A Few Good Men. They couldn't handle the truth. And that resulted in about three of our staff members over a period of time choosing to get off the bus. And it was somewhat painful, but it was somewhat necessary. Our lay leadership, we were able to come in and challenge some of their presuppositions. And it is amazing to me how intelligent people can have a presupposition and you bring them into a church context and you show them factual information and all of a sudden, their worldview changes about what our church is about and what we're good at.

George Bullard: In a good way? Changed in a good way?

Clay Smith: In a good way. Yeah, very much in a good way. One of the challenges I think we had, because we did not have a historical background of being the First Baptist Church or the affluent church in town, there was a built-in bias in our congregation to think we are poor. As a result, our staff acted like we were poor. We programmed as if we were poor, and Tom's data came in and showed us that our people have money, they're just not putting it in the offering plate.

 So that was a huge mindset shift for us. I would say also one of the huge, huge benefits of this, that our personnel team embraced and we embrace in our staff hires is there's no point in hiring somebody who is outside of the demographic profile that we're good at reaching. All we're doing then is bringing in a cultural mismatch and culture is really, really huge.

George Bullard: So there are strong staff implications, you're saying too.

Clay Smith: Incredibly strong.

George Bullard: What about volunteer implications?

Clay Smith: Yes. We have discovered that and I think this is true in every church. In every church, there are people who clamor for your attention. Sometimes they have a lot of pastoral needs and sometimes they are eager volunteers.

 We made the mistake far too often of putting eager volunteers into leadership positions and we did not realize we had mismatched them, where they were from one demographical background. And after you work with this data a while you get a feel for, yeah, this is which pond you're in.

 And when we keep them in their pond, they do fantastic in terms of leading a group, for example. When we take them out of that pond and put them in a different pond, it's disaster. A real life illustration for us, I think may be applicable to some Columbia area churches. Sumpter is a military town. Those military folks fit a certain demographical profile. When we have a group that is led by somebody from that profile, that group is going to attract those military families. If we take that same leader and we put him into a group that's from a different demographical profile, the group will die.

Chris Reinolds: Interesting.

George Bullard: Makes great sense.

Chris Reinolds: From a very practical ministry-related, fruits-oriented sort of mindset, what has been the greatest success that has come out of walking through this process with Tom?

Clay Smith: There have been more ... The best way I think to describe it is this is very much like Jim Collins, a lot of pushes on the fly wheel. So it's hard for me to pinpoint and say there's one win. But if I had to pinpoint one, I would say it is changing the way we think.

 We now make better decisions. We have a better filter for those decisions. We have a better understanding of our identity. We have a better understanding of our strengths. We have a better understanding of our calling. This allows us to have a laser focus. You know, one of the passages I've never heard preached is when Jesus says, "I am sending you," when he sent out the disciples, “I am sending you to the lost sheep of Israel, do not go to the Gentiles, do not go to the Samaritans.”

 And I think that particularly in Baptist life, we don't like that passage because that runs, in our minds, very much against our ethos of being Great Commission people. But I think that Matthew put both the Great Commission and that statement in his gospel to teach us something: that there would be times when you have a very focused mission and that focused mission is at the local level. And every church I think is created by God to have a focused mission at a local level and it has helped us know what our mission is.

George Bullard: Now, Clay, I don't want to minimize the rich depth of what's here, but our listeners might want to know when Tom first started working with you after you'd been there 10 or 12 years and now, what's the size difference in your church?

Clay Smith: When Tom started working with us, we were hanging right about a 1,000 people. Dick Lincoln, who was formally pastor at Shandon once told me that getting a church over the 1,000 barrier was as close as he can imagine a pastor coming to giving birth.

 We now we now average over 1,500. Sunday we had about 1,730 people on both of our campuses. It has really helped us and in bringing Tom back this second time, one of the things we've recognized is we were at another size barrier. Tom's data is helping us process through how we even break past that.

 Tom often tells me you're not supposed to have a church like Alice Drive at a place like Sumpter. But I can tell you if it hadn't been for Tom and the wisdom we've gained from the data, we would not be where we are today.

Chris Reinolds: Wow, that's good. That's real good. Tom, how can people connect with you if they are wanting to find out more information about demographic and lifestyle data and that sort of analysis?

Tom Carringer: Sure. Chris, right now I'm working with the South Carolina Baptist Convention. And providing this information but I'm also working with George Bullard. And so, what I would suggest is I would suggest if a church is interested in accessing some of this data for them to get in touch with George Bullard. I'm more than happy to give out my personal information. It's not about that, but in the context, George knows more about the context of that church as Director of Missions. And so I'm more interested in working with George and working with your church because Columbia Metro Association, they really are a family. They're a family of churches. And so I'd rather have part of the family walking with us as we work through this information and George is looking more broad in the Columbia Metro area and so he can help provide us some valuable insight that I can't even help provide to help us seem even more in context of what we're trying to do, so get in touch with George and I'll be more than happy to engage in providing this information.

George Bullard: Well, let me turn it around and say, Clay, if someone wanted to know more about the Alice Drive Baptist Church story, how should they connect with that?

Clay Smith: Well as tempting as it is to say, get in contact with George Bullard.

George Bullard: Not necessary.

Clay Smith: You can check us out on our website, [AliceDrive.org](http://www.alicedrive.org/), or you can feel free to email me, WCSmith@ADBC.org.

Chris Reinolds: Great. And we'll put that stuff in the show notes. Once again, we want to thank you guys for coming and spending some time with us today.

Clay Smith: Thank you.

George Bullard: We appreciate it. We appreciate them coming.

Chris Reinolds: Absolutely. And to all our listeners, thank you for joining with us and please be sure to check out today's show notes for more detailed information about the show. Also, if you found this podcast helpful to you or your ministry, share it with others so we can get the word out about what God is doing through this important ministry. Until next time from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know. It's the good news about the good news in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.