

What's Your Marketing

Learn more about your marketing strengths and weaknesses by evaluating key personality traits.

by *Kindra Gordon*

Why are some people relatively calm, cool and collected when it comes to marketing cattle (or crops) while others find it a nerve-wracking, emotional roller coaster?

Part of the answer may lie in your personality style — such as how you make decisions, how you deal with emotional situations, and how you handle change. That's according to Roy and Sharon Smith, a Nebraska couple who have been farming for nearly four decades.

One of their earliest lessons in marketing stretches back to 1974, which was among the hottest years on record in Nebraska, when their corn crop burned up. Their marketing profits also went up in flames, and, Roy says, "What came out of that year was that we realized we needed to do a better job of marketing and take the emotion out of it."

At that time, the couple got involved with numerous marketing workshops and even a marketing strategy research project. They became aware of the cyclical and seasonal price trends for both cattle and crops to help them make better marketing decisions. Roy even began presenting crop marketing seminars, which he continues to do today.

"We can see seasonal price trends," he says, "but I had this constant frustration that farmers didn't adopt them. And, even I myself had a difficult time pulling the trigger (i.e. selling) when it needed to be pulled."

He wondered why this was, and he believes he's found some of the reason in personality types.

Personality reality

Personality profiles date back hundreds of years with numerous variations of the tests individuals can take to assess their personality traits. The Myers-Briggs profile is among one of the most well-known and widely used. It evaluates four main traits: Extrovert vs. Introvert; Intuitive vs. Sensing; Feeling vs. Thinking; and Perceiving vs. Judging. This allows for 16 possible outcomes of personality types.

Sharon, a teacher by trade, had used the personality profile in her classes to help her better understand and work with her students.

Several years back, Roy began reading one of the books she used on the subject and had

a "light bulb moment." He began making a connection with people's personality types and their marketing styles.

Roy took the personality test, which entails answering a series of simple questions like "Do you approach people or wait to be approached?" He then read the description about the personality category that he was characterized as and was surprised to find it fit him exactly — and it also fit his marketing practices.

Roy has since studied some of the research conducted in the 1980s looking at

personality types and farmers. It reveals personality types are not randomly distributed; instead, the majority of farmers are clustered in a few groups. Roy has also tested his theory with real farmers in several of the marketing seminars he presents by having them take personality profiles and then evaluating them.

He says, "There's quite a bit of research on personality types, but not a lot of information linking it to marketing strategies." However, he is convinced that knowing your personality type can help you learn about yourself, and says, "It helps you understand why you get upset about things, especially marketing things. So I think it is a valuable tool to understand."

Sharon adds, "For most of us, learning how to market is clumsy and not easy. But we can learn to get better at it, and understanding your personality traits is one way to help do that."

What they've learned

From their experiences and study of marketing and personalities, the Smiths say there are several commonalities that can be drawn from the four Myers-Briggs personality categories and how they apply to marketing. Here, they share some of their conclusions.

Extrovert (E) vs. Introvert (I): This is how we recharge our life, Sharon explains. The extrovert gets motivated from being around people, and therefore is more likely to share ideas and discuss decisions. The introvert prefers solitude and being alone, and thus only seeks advice from one or two people and keeps decisions to themselves.

Relating this personality style to marketing, Roy says either type can be a good marketer. He says extroverts may be more likely to do marketing themselves, whereas the introvert prefers to hire an expert. But he counters that, saying, "Some of the most successful marketers I've known have been introverts."

Research shows that on average 52% of the general population are extroverts and 48% are introverts. However, most farmers (60%) tend to be introverts.

Intuitive (N) vs. Sensing (S): This describes how the individual takes in

More marketing tips

As some final advice, Roy and Sharon Smith offer these marketing insights.

Don't be paralyzed by the fear of failure. Roy suggests taking small steps with any marketing choices you make.

"Don't commit 100% of your crop to something the first time you sell it that way," he says. "Do 10% to 20% to try it, and if it works, do more. The only way to learn is to get educated and then try it."

Join marketing clubs or have a support group of two or three people with whom you can share ideas. Roy says this is especially important if you have a strong thinking or judging personality type. He adds that it also helps to have complementary personality types working together in operations. "It often helps to have another opinion from a personality type that is different from your own," he says.

Lastly, have a marketing plan based on historical data that includes a goal price and timeline and use it as a guide.

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information. “The intuitive person works from inspiration,” Sharon says. “They are innovative and don’t care about details. Sensing personality types base information on experiences and hard work. They are practical and want details. They want to see, hear and touch.”

Applying this to marketing, Roy says that individuals with a sensing personality gravitate toward dealing with cash-only marketing because it is practical. “They sell from storage,” Roy says.

Because intuitive personalities tend to seek more innovative tools, they are more apt to use futures and options, he says. “The intuitive personality is more comfortable selling ahead where the payoff with futures and options is not immediate and is a negative payoff in a lot of situations.”

However, Roy emphasizes again that either of these personality types can be successful at marketing. “You don’t have to use futures to be a good marketer or sell ahead,” he says. “You can do well with cash. The key isn’t what tool you use, but that it has historic research behind it and that you have the self-discipline to follow that.”

On average, 44% of the general population is intuitive and 56% is sensing. Among farmers, 16% are intuitive and 84% are sensing, based on the research that was conducted in the mid-1980s. Today, Roy thinks this has shifted somewhat with a new generation of farmers in place and is closer to 30% intuitive and 70% sensing.

Feeling (F) vs. Thinking (T): This

personality trait relates to how an individual makes decisions, and Roy believes it is also an important category related to marketing decisions.

The feeling person works from conviction, is subjective, and is influenced greatly by emotions. The thinking personality works more from logic.

While it may seem that a logical person may be better equipped for making marketing decisions, Roy points out that marketing is not always logical. For example, he says, “If you make a decision on supply and demand and then the market goes the other way, that’s not logical. So the feeling personality handles that situation better.”

Among the general population, about 44% are feeling and 56% are thinking. Similarly, among farmers 41% are feeling and 59% are thinking. However, when you break this category down by gender, only 20% of men are feeling with 80% thinking; whereas 65% of women are feeling and 35% are thinking.

Roy and Sharon say with couples this usually means that one of the individuals is a thinking personality and one is a feeling personality, which may be beneficial to balancing out some marketing decisions.

Perceiving (P) vs. Judging (J): This category sums up how an individual lives his or her life and is oriented to the world. Perceiving personalities are flexible, open-ended and willing to “go with the flow.” Judging personalities need organization and structure. They are the list-makers and seek

closure. They want one thing done before they move to the next project.

Roy believes these personality traits have the most influence on an individual’s marketing style.

As an example, he points out that judging personality types want low risk. They want to know everything before making a decision. However, that can be a hindrance in marketing and can lead to what Roy calls “paralysis by analysis.” He explains, “Waiting to have all the information may not be timely, and facts change with the weather, supply, etc.”

Meanwhile, the perceiving personality can handle more risk and is able to make decisions on incomplete data. Of this personality type, Roy says, “Perceiving individuals like the process, the thrill of the unknown, and they often view marketing as a game.”

As another example, Roy points out that agriculture has a structure and timeline that it follows every year, such as “breed, calve, wean, market” or “plant, fertilize, harvest, sell.” The judging personality likes that structure. However, if the economics indicate selling should come along at planting time — for instance, through forward contracting — that seems backward to the judging personality. Whereas the perceiving person is more apt to be able to do that, Roy says.

Among this personality type, Roy has concluded that strong perceiving personalities don’t necessarily make good business managers because they have a tendency to lose control. Instead, he says, “The best marketers have a judging personality, which gives them a business advantage, but they are able to have some perceiving traits.”

About 40% of the general population are perceiving and 60% are judging personalities. Among farmers 23% are perceiving and 77% are judging.

If you’d like to learn more about your personality type, Roy recommends the following two web sites for taking a personality test online:

www.humanmetrics.com offers a free test and results; www.keirsey.com charges \$14.95 for test results.



Reading about personality types

Roy Smith recommends these books for more information about personality types.

- ▶ *Type Talk: The 16 Personality Types That Determine How We Live, Love, and Work*, by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen
- ▶ *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*, by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates
- ▶ *Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence*, by David Keirsey
- ▶ *Nurture by Nature: How to Raise Happy, Healthy, Responsible Children Through the Insights of Personality Type*, by Paul D. Tieger, Barbara Barron-Tieger and E. Michael Ellovich
- ▶ *What Will I Do With My Money?*, by Ray Linder (Offers insight on how your temperament affects your financial decisions.)

All of these books are available at www.amazon.com.