

## **Sunday Column – Eye of the Beholder**

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What is it that makes a dog or cat more or less adoptable than the one in the kennel next door? What is that special quality you look for in a companion animal? This is a topic that tends to occupy our minds in the world of animal welfare. It is not just our business to know this. Depending on the shelter this can be a life or death proposition for that animal or the one who will eventually take his place on the adoption floor.

Priceconomics is a San Francisco based company self-described as, “a collection of writers, data scientists, engineers and analysts that are obsessed with creating and spreading quality, data-driven information.” In 2015 they wrote an article entitled, “What Kinds of Pets Get Adopted?”

They worked with a company called Petfinder, the internet’s largest on-line adoption site, and where PAWS Humane and some 13,000 other shelters post our adoptable animals. Using the Petfinder data base the Priceconomics folks pulled a sample of 83,000 animals that were listed between June 1<sup>st</sup> and June 25<sup>th</sup> in 2015. By tracking adoption activity into early September, 2015 they drew certain conclusions regarding the specific qualities that make an animal most adoptable.

Many of the qualities identified as desirable will not surprise anyone. When it comes to a pet’s age, whether the animal is a dog or cat, most people strongly prefer puppies and kittens. Kittens are pretty easy pets. Puppies, on the other hand, are challenging. I think that is putting it mildly and we cringe when we see adopters return a now teenager or young adult large breed dog who is out of control.

The cuteness overload seems to overcome common sense in the decision making process when adopting a canine. A significant commitment is required to raise a puppy into a well-behaved dog. If the dog is large-breed mere bad manners can be a deal breaker once the dog is large enough to knock over Aunt Harriet just before sitting down for Thanksgiving dinner. That’s when Fido gets returned to the shelter which has even less time to iron out these personality kinks for the next adopter.

Senior dogs and cats are significantly less likely to be adopted which is a shame because they make wonderful companions. They are wise and so much more laid back.

Size is not an issue with cats as they don’t vary nearly so much as dogs. The variance in adoption rates of dogs in different size categories is not as great as age variances but it is noticeable. Without a doubt the smaller breeds are in greater demand than large breeds.

Breed is a significant indicator of adoptability. Certain large breeds need more exercise and not everyone is confident in handling bigger dogs. Breed restrictions are alive and well in the rental housing and insurance markets and specific breeds are prohibited. As you may imagine the various breeds categorized as “pit bull” are by far the least likely to be adopted.

I was surprised to see that black dogs fare well in the ratings, beaten only by the golden color group. And with cats the Tuxedo (black and white) coloring was the least likely to be adopted.

About an hour ago (as I write this) I just said goodbye to my latest foster dog, Shuga, a beautiful red nose pit mix, who according to this study is undesirable for her breed and color. She went to a couple who I know will give her the love and care she deserves.

I've had the pleasure of fostering dogs of many ages, sizes, colors and breeds. I have to say that Shuga was one of the sweetest dogs who has ever lived under my roof. I would have kept her in a heartbeat if I didn't feel called to make room for the next dog in need of a foster home.

If you're thinking of adding a pet to your household keep an open mind. Age, color, size and even breed don't necessarily tell you anything worth knowing about your new best friend.

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