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## Study: Brands can fare better with buyers than prospects

Jim Henry

Automotive News

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Several vehicle brands that score well on measures of sales satisfaction do a below-average job of appealing to prospective buyers, a new market research study concludes.

The difference, the study's author says, is that measures such as the J.D. Power Sales Satisfaction Index include only consumers who buy a particular brand. The "Prospect Satisfaction Index," compiled by Pied Piper Management Co. LLC, also surveys customers who shopped but didn't buy.

"Nobody's been able to measure prospect satisfaction before," says Fran O'Hagan, president of Pied Pi-per, of Pacific Grove, Calif.

The Pied Piper survey, released last week, ranked Acura on top, followed by Land Rover and Saturn. By contrast, Lincoln and Cadillac, which did well in the latest Power sales satisfaction survey, were below par in the Pied Piper index.

O'Hagan says his company interviewed shoppers as they left 1,592 dealerships this spring. The shoppers, who had taken test drives, were asked about their satisfaction with the sales process. That included such measures as whether salespeople asked for contact information, were well-informed about vehicles and offered a persuasive reason to buy from the dealership.

Although dealers authorized the interviews, O'Hagan says, salespeople weren't aware of them.

Pied Piper then assigned "secret shoppers" to visit the same dealerships. Those shoppers went through the buying process but quit once they were quoted a firm vehicle price.

The Prospect Satisfaction Index combines the results of the customer interviews and the secret shopper visits, says O'Hagan, a former vice president of retail operations for Jaguar Cars North America.

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Pied Piper's Fran O'Hagan: "Nobody's been able to measure prospect satisfaction before."

