
Comparing the retail experience in 3 industries

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Editor

A unique survey analyzing the sales processes in the motorcycle, auto and RV industries shows the powersports sector lacking in several key categories.

Motorcycle salesmen are less likely to greet their customers and build rapport with them and also rarely ask for a sale or provide consumers a reason to buy from their dealership in comparison to their RV and auto counterparts, according to the comparison survey.

The Pacific Grove, Calif., company behind the Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index completed similar shopping surveys in all three industries. The company performed 375 evaluations of motorcycle dealerships across the nation between November 2006 and January 2007. From April through June, they examined close to 1,600 auto dealerships, or one out of 14 dealerships in the United States.

At the same time, the company also evaluated more than 500 RV stores, all of which carry the large Class A vehicles.

In each instance, independent contractors hired by Pied Piper evaluated the shopping experience and the effectiveness of the salesman.

The retail comparison found the motorcycle industry behind the auto and RV industries in several areas, including:

Greeting consumers: Motorcycle retailers do it 74 percent of the time while the auto industry does it 85 percent and the RV 89 percent.

Building rapport with the shopper: Motorcycle salespeople try to find a common interest with consumers 68 percent while the RV salespeople do it 82 percent and the auto side 83 percent.

Reasons to buy from the dealership: Motorcycle retailers do this just 33 percent of the time, substantially less than the auto (50 percent) and the RV sides (60 percent).

Asking for the sale: Again, motorcycle sales staff are vastly under their counterparts, asking for a sale slightly less than half the time while the RV (66 percent) and auto (75 percent) retailers are far more likely to do this.

“The motorcycle industry has a lot of room for improvement,” said Fran O’Hagan, president of Pied Piper Management Co., the California-based management consulting company that runs a mystery shopping program for Ducati North America. O’Hagan notes that the “industry average numbers we’re dealing with here is a C grade, meaning half of the stores are better and half of them are worse.”

The industry comparison isn’t exactly an apples-to-apples survey as autos are mostly looked as a “need” by consumers, rather than a “want” as motorcycles and RVs often are seen as.

“In many cases, they don’t have to buy an RV,” O’Hagan said. “It’s something where the salesman can play a big role. And that’s what I see for the motorcycle industry that’s not happening today. The salespeople are not playing a big role in many instances. And it’s a pity because it’s an impulse buy. It’s not practical transportation, and the shoppers could really benefit from having an ally to help them fall in love with the motorcycle.”

The comparison between the three industries also revealed motorcycle salespeople are less likely

to encourage a shopper to return (35 percent of the time vs. 62 percent for RV and 76 percent for auto).

The Prospect Satisfaction Index differs from a generic mystery shopping effort in two ways: in advance of the survey Pied Piper determined, through internal and external research, what questions were the most important to determine effective sales processes, and then those questions were put forth by a "shopper" that behaved like an average powersports consumer.