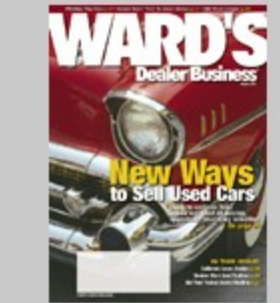




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Dealership Myth Is Debunked

By Cliff Banks

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Pushy car salespeople are more fiction than fact, according to a study that challenges many of the negative stereotypes in the auto industry.

Pied Piper Management Co.'s Prospect Satisfaction Index measures how well shoppers are treated at the dealership.

"The perception is far worse than reality," says Fran O'Hagan, president of Pied Piper, based in Pacific Grove, CA. "The treatment prospects receive on average is very good and professional."

Less than 5% of people surveyed say they were oversold at the dealership. Ironically, more than 20% believe the salesperson undersold them.

The auto industry fares well when compared with other industries, according to similar Pied Piper surveys this year on the motorcycle and recreational vehicle industries.

The automotive study finds 51% of the prospective customers say sales people provided a compelling reason to buy from their dealerships, whereas only 35% of motorcycle shoppers say the same.

General Motor Corp.'s Saturn Div. was the only domestic brand to finish in the top 10 in the survey, coming in a close third behind Honda Motor Co. Ltd.'s Acura Div. and Ford Motor Co.'s Land Rover brand.

Acura finished first, not because it dominated any one category, but because it was consistently good across all of the categories, O'Hagan says.

Meanwhile, eight of the bottom 10 brands on the survey are domestic. Kia and Scion, Toyota Motor Corp.'s Gen X brand, also scored near the bottom.

However, Toyota was ranked right at the industry average.

"There appears to be a fairly high correlation between where a brand ranks and its units sold per franchise," O'Hagan says. "Eight of the top 10 brands averaged more than 250 vehicles sold per store, while only three of the bottom 10 reached that number."

During the 3-month study, prospects at 1,592 dealerships were asked a series of "yes" and "no" questions upon leaving the store. The questions focused on 55 of 233 dealership sales processes identified by Pied Piper.

The questions were grouped into 11 categories dealing with areas such as facilities; product display; the welcome; as well as the salesperson's professionalism, attitude and knowledge.

"Facilities were not that important," O'Hagan says. "Of course, you have to attract the customer and that is part of it. But anything having to do with the salesperson is important."

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