



M-B dealers rank highest in satisfaction study

Mercedes-Benz dealerships ranked highest in the newly released 2009 Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index (PSI) U.S. Auto Industry Study, one of a series of unique national benchmarking studies that measure how consumers are treated when shopping for a new car, motorcycle, RV or boat. Following Mercedes-Benz were Lexus, Jaguar, Saturn and Land Rover. The independent study sent 3,531 hired anonymous "mystery shoppers" into auto dealerships nationwide, then used the patent-pending PSI process to compile the results into an accurate measurement of how each brand's dealerships treat car shoppers.

The 2009 study showed that a brand or dealership's treatment of shoppers paralleled their retail sales success. Eight of the top ten brands when ranked by PSI also gained market share from 2008 to 2009, while eight of the bottom ten brands when ranked by PSI lost market share from 2008 to 2009. Overall auto industry performance improved notably from 2008 to 2009, with 30 of the 37 major auto brands achieving higher PSI scores.

Luxury brands captured nine of the top ten positions, with GM's Saturn dealerships representing the only non-luxury brand, as well as one of the two - along with Cadillac - top ten brands owned by a U.S. company. Overall industry gain was led by improvement from all five of the top five sales volume brands: Toyota, Ford, Chevrolet, Honda and Nissan. Other brands recording the most improvement from 2008 to 2009 included Mercedes-Benz, Mini, Smart and Chrysler. Among the "orphan" brands slated for sale or closure, Saturn finished well above the industry average, Volvo scored at the industry average, Hummer scored below the industry average, while Saab and Pontiac scored well below the industry average.

"Nine out of ten car shoppers walk back out a dealership's door without buying," said Fran O'Hagan, CEO of Pied Piper Management Co., LLC. "The tough economic climate of the past year has clearly encouraged salespeople to be more helpful to the majority of shoppers who aren't yet ready to buy, but still need help narrowing-down their selection."

Auto industry salespeople were 14% more likely this year to ask about obstacles preventing purchase; 13% more likely to mention the availability of Certified Pre-Owned vehicles; 13% more likely to provide compelling reasons why it would be in the shopper's best interest to purchase now; 9% more likely to ask shoppers what attracted them to this particular brand; and 9% more likely to mention the availability of different financing options. In contrast, auto industry salespeople were less likely this year to offer a brochure, and were less likely to make the process of special ordering an out-of-stock vehicle seem simple and easy.

As many as one-third of a brand's car shoppers report that their salesperson suggested that they consider an alternative brand carried by the dealership or dealer group instead of the brand requested by the shopper. Shoppers asking for vehicles from Dodge, GMC, Chrysler, Kia and Pontiac were most likely to encounter salespeople who suggested that shoppers consider a different brand instead, while salespeople from Mercedes-Benz, Audi, Volvo, Lexus and Honda dealerships were the least likely to suggest an alternative brand instead.

The 2009 Pied Piper PSI U.S. Auto Industry Study was conducted between July 2008 and June 2009 using 3,531 hired anonymous "mystery shoppers" at dealerships located throughout the U.S. Examples of other recent Pied Piper PSI studies are the 2009 Pied Piper PSI U.S. Motorcycle Industry Study, in which Ducati was ranked first, and the 2008 Pied Piper PSI U.S. RV Industry Study (Class A), in which Winnebago's Itasca brand was ranked first. Complete Pied Piper PSI industry study results are provided to vehicle manufacturers and national dealer groups. Manufacturers, national dealer groups and individual dealerships also order PSI evaluations as a tool to improve the sales effectiveness of their dealerships.

For more information visit: www.piedpiperpsi.com.

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