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Mercedes-Benz Is Tops In Shopper Satisfaction, But Tesla? Not So Much



By Richard Read

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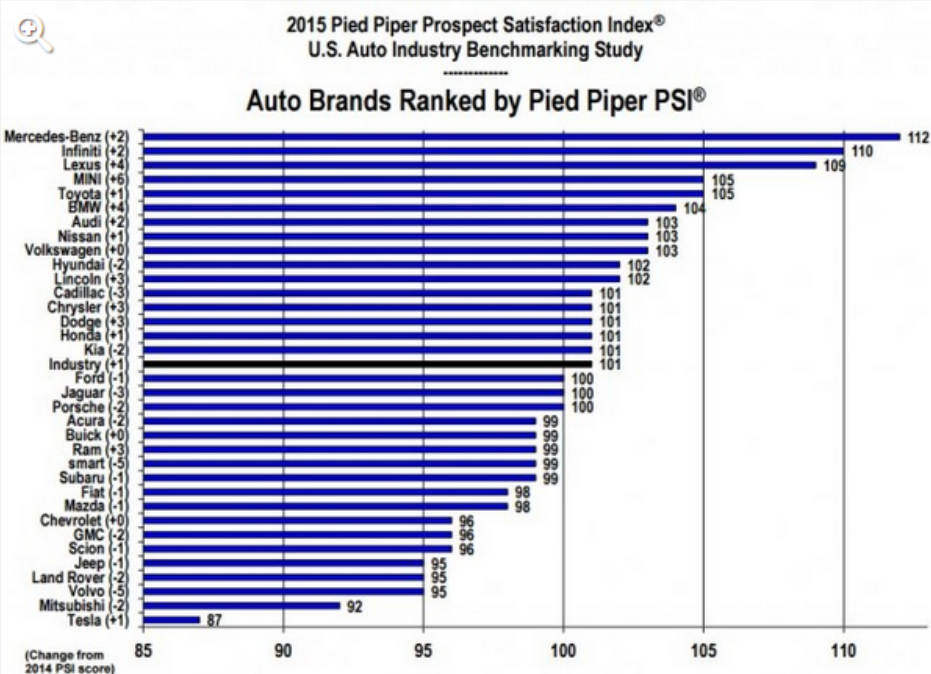
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2015 Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index

Today's [auto market](#) is a tough one for consumers. There are loads of great cars on the lots, and the differences between those from Toyota, Ford, Volkswagen, and most other mass-market automakers are disappearing.

In that kind of environment, **customer service is king**. The way sales personnel treat shoppers can make or break a dealership. That's why studies like the Prospect Satisfaction Index (PSI) from research firm Pied Piper are so important -- and telling.

For the 2015 PSI, Pied Piper sent some 6,370 mystery shoppers to dealerships across the U.S. between July 2014 and June 2015. Those shoppers -- "prospects" in marketing lingo -- then rated the dealerships they visited on more than 50 criteria, including whether they offered customers a [test drive](#), whether they asked how customers planned to use their vehicles, and whether they

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provided printed materials for shoppers to take home.


When all the dust had settled and the scores were tabulated, the average score for all brands ticked up from 100 to 101 -- though as Pied Piper notes, even the top-scoring companies had individual dealerships that performed poorly, and low-scoring companies had dealerships that aced the test.

On the whole, though, **Mercedes-Benz** outpaced the competition, with a score of 112. Infiniti, Lexus, MINI, and Toyota rounded out the top five, boasting scores in the 105 to 110 range. With the exception of MINI, most of those -- along with BMW, Volkswagen, Honda, and Cadillac -- have scored above the industry average for the past five years.


And MINI could be *en route* to keeping its position at the top, since it posted one of the biggest year-over-year improvements, climbing six points from 2014. BMW, Lexus, Chrysler, Dodge, Lincoln, and Ram moved up, too, each edging up three or four points.

At the other end of the scale, we find [Tesla](#) , with a very low score of 87. In its defense, however, Tesla is hamstrung by the many restrictions it faces on the sales front. Because of strict franchise laws, the automaker is still prohibited from actively selling cars in many of its showrooms; it can only share information and refer shoppers to the Tesla website for pricing and such. Until that changes -- and it is, *slowly* -- the cards will be stacked against Tesla in surveys like the PSI because it doesn't always operate full-service dealerships.

The other four brands in Pied Piper's bottom five, however, have no such excuses. Mitsubishi, Volvo, Land Rover, and Jeep all scored between 92 and 95 points on the PSI. Smart, Jaguar, and Cadillac could be joining them in the lower depths before long, since they posted the biggest year-over-year declines in their scores. Smart and Volvo tied for biggest missteps, both tumbling five points.


You can see how your favorite [auto](#)  brand stacked up on the 2015 Prospect Satisfaction Index -- just have a look at Pied Piper's chart, embedded above.

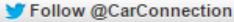
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