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Infiniti tops survey on satisfaction among sales prospects

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Vince Bond Jr.   

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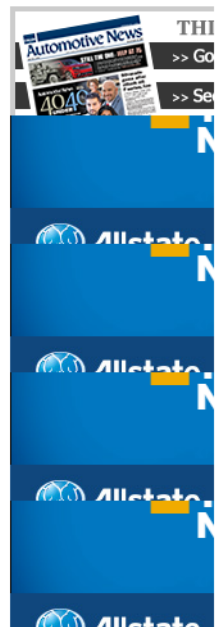
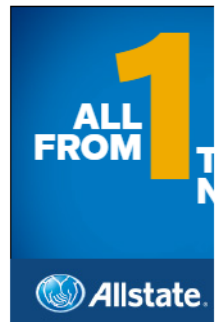
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Infiniti stores outperformed all brands in a new study on prospect satisfaction.

The 2016 Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index is based on the treatment of mystery shoppers who visited 6,157 stores in the U.S. The study was conducted between July 2015 and June 2016.

Foreign brands dominated the upper echelon of the index -- now in its 10th year -- taking nine of the top 10 spots. Lexus and Mercedes-Benz stores tied for second; Toyota ranked third; Audi was fourth; and BMW rounded out the top five.

Cadillac, in ninth place, had the highest-ranked stores among domestic brands.



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Porsche, Land Rover and Mitsubishi had the biggest year-over-year improvements. Two brands, Mini and Tesla, each fell back a point from last year.

The lowest-ranked brands, starting from the bottom, are Tesla, Volvo, Mitsubishi, Mazda, Jeep and Chevrolet.

Last year, Mercedes-Benz stores earned the top spot, Infiniti took the No. 2 spot and Lexus placed third.

Pied Piper says eight brands have consistently ranked at or above the industry average for each of the past five years: BMW, Cadillac, Honda, Infiniti, Lexus, Mercedes-Benz, Toyota and Volkswagen.

In contrast, the company said three brands have regularly finished below the industry average for each of the past five years: Chevrolet, Land Rover and Mitsubishi.

The brands with the greatest score improvement were Porsche, Land Rover and Mitsubishi. Each rose five points. Mini and Tesla were the only brands whose index scored declined, one point each.

Sales correlation

The company says there is a correlation between sales and index scores. Pied Piper said brands in the top quarter sell 16 percent more vehicles than stores in the bottom quarter.

Salesperson behaviors that brands increased the most in the last 10 years include mentioning the availability of different financing and lease options; asking about reasons preventing purchase; and discussing features that are unique from competitors.

Salespeople spoke of financing and leasing option availability 79 percent of the time in 2016. Infiniti, Lexus and Toyota were the best performers in this category, while Subaru, Tesla and Lincoln were the lowest-scoring brands.

Salespeople asked about reasons preventing a purchase 74 percent of the time in the latest index, with Toyota, Fiat and Kia leading the pack in this behavior. The weaker performers in this area were Tesla, Smart and Cadillac.

In addition, sales staffers discussed features that are unique compared to competing brands 63 percent of the time. Tesla, Subaru and Lexus stores did best in this category, while Chrysler, Chevrolet and Mitsubishi floundered.

Sales behaviors that decreased the most vs. 10 years ago when the study began include offering printed materials for shoppers to take with them; asking how the vehicle will be used; and asking why the consumer considered the brand.

Salespeople offered printed materials 45 percent of the time in 2016, while 70 percent asked how the vehicle would be used. Meanwhile, 59 percent of salespeople asked why the brand was considered.

“There is no question that the typical dealership sells more effectively today than it did ten years ago,” said Fran O’Hagan, CEO of Pied Piper Management Co., in a statement. “However, plenty of variability remains. We have watched some brands completely change the way that they sell, while others sell today no differently than they did ten years ago.”

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