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Audi Dealers Do It Best, Tesla's Are Worst, According to Car-Shopping Study

The study measured how well dealerships are selling cars to potential buyers.

JULY 25, 2018 AT 9:36 AM BY DAVID MULLER PHOTOS BY THE MANUFACTURER ILLUSTRATIONS BY PIED PIPER PSI 43 COMMENTS



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Audi topped an annual study called the Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index (PSI), which measures how well dealerships are doing at selling cars to potential buyers. Tesla finished last. Pied Piper Management (a real company, not the fictitious one on the *Silicon Valley* television show) said the results of its study, which carries the full name of 2018 Prospect Satisfaction Index U.S. Auto Industry Benchmarking Study, came after mystery shoppers visited 3466 dealerships representing 34 auto brands between July 2017 and June 2018.

Audi, Jeep, and GMC saw the biggest year-over-year improvements, while Infiniti, Tesla, and Porsche had the biggest declines (see full rankings below). As for Tesla's last-place finish, Pied Piper founder and CEO Fran O'Hagan said the electric-vehicle brand, which has been included in the report since 2014, has shown some inconsistencies at its retail locations. "We found that in about one in four visits nationwide, the experience with a Tesla salesperson is brilliant, to the point that there's nothing to improve," he said. But other times, he said, although salespeople may be knowledgeable about the product, they seem to stop short of actually trying to move it out the door. He also said they tend to be weak on providing information about services such as vehicle trade-ins.



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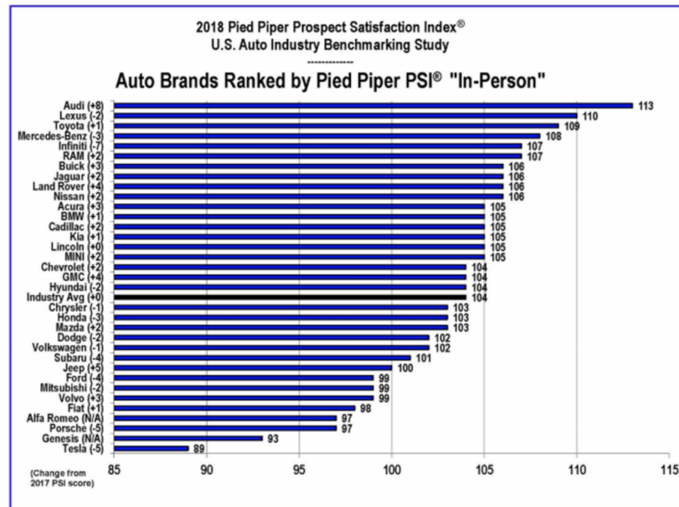
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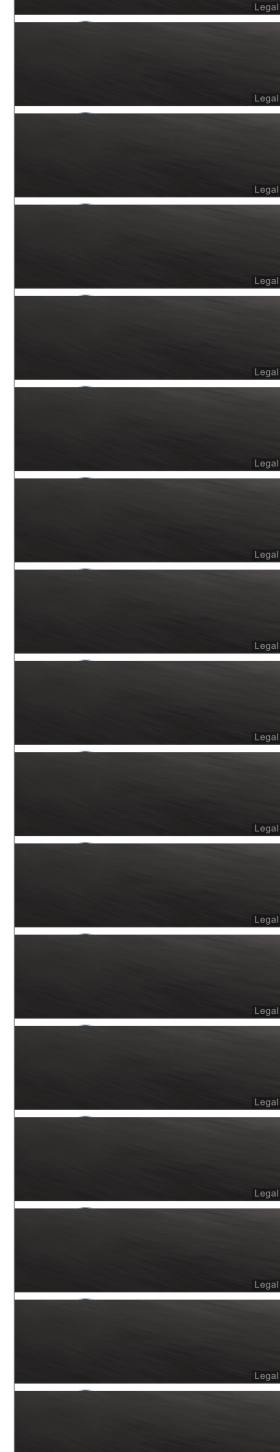
Dealerships were graded on how salespeople handled customers; however, Pied Piper does not use traditional mystery shoppers, who tend to report on things such as whether the bathrooms are clean. Rather, O'Hagan said, the company hires actors who have been trained to gauge how salespeople are operating. Some examples of dealers doing things right: Audi salespeople were most likely to ask customers about how they intend to use the vehicle, to provide a "walkaround demonstration" of features, and to name things that distinguish the brand's vehicles from those of competitors. Pied Piper's mystery shoppers touch on some 50 points, including whether salespeople ask if customers have visited dealer websites, if they display visual aids such as vehicle cutaways, and whether they offer reasons to buy from that dealer, including special features such as mobile service visits.



Source: 2018 Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index® U.S. Auto Industry Benchmarking Study www.piedpiperpsi.com

Conversely, dealers can score worse for being like "museum curators," O'Hagan said. That means a salesperson is friendly and knowledgeable about a vehicle but will do little else to encourage ownership of it. Another negative practice cited in the Pied Piper study is whether a salesperson walks away to try to negotiate a "best price" with an unseen manager. As car buyers know, it can be an annoying tactic, and most people would rather not be subject to it.

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So what can consumers take away from the results of the Pied Piper study, which is aimed at helping automakers improve their selling processes? O'Hagan said it's important to know that thanks to a wealth of information on the internet nowadays, the car-selling game has changed. It used to be that consumers would walk into a dealership and have little to no idea which model they wanted. Now, many people have a pretty good idea of what they're after, perhaps down to the model and trim level, and can be armed with intelligence on the specific car or truck before they walk into a dealership. "Today, the information is out there," O'Hagan said. "Consumers can find anything they want to know about the different products that are available to them, and the typical consumer today is making use of that information."

