

RECENT

Rimac-Porsche JV Takes Control of Hypercar Maker Bugatti

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J.D. Power Acquires Automotive F&I Software Provider

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Pied Piper Study: Automakers

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Chrysler Pacifica PHEV.

DEALERS

Chrysler Tops at Connecting EVs With Customers

The Pied Piper study looked at how well automakers and dealers do at promoting electric vehicles and at handling customers interested in them.

Steve Finlay | Jul 13, 2021



Chrysler tops a new study's ranking of how well vehicle brands feature their electrified vehicles online and how well dealerships field EV customer inquiries, both digitally and in-store.

Chrysler's high score is ironic for a couple of reasons. First, although Chrysler is a venerable nameplate, it seldom tops auto industry rankings. Second, the brand only offers one electrified product: the Pacifica plug-in hybrid minivan.

Now a Stellantis nameplate, Chrysler took No.1 in the 2021 Pied Piper Omnichannel Prospect Satisfaction Index for Electric Vehicles Study. BMW ranked second of the 21 electrified-vehicle brands evaluated, followed by BMW's Mini brand, Porsche, Toyota and Hyundai. **(The complete ranking appears below.)**

Pied Piper President and CEO Fran O'Hagan says the study aims to answer: "What happens when EV customers shop for a vehicle by first visiting the brand's website, or a dealership website, and then visit a dealership in person?"

Chrysler made it to the top of the list largely because of the automaker's Pacifica PHEV's dedicated website. "It's brilliant, with lots of tools," O'Hagan **(pictured, below left)** tells WardsAuto.

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Pied Piper measured how well the auto brands offered shoppers an omnichannel path that was intuitive, simple to use, easy to navigate, effective at showcasing products and expedited an easy purchase.

The consulting firm also measured dealer response to EV mystery shopping inquiries submitted through a combination of automaker and local dealer websites.

The submissions asked about a vehicle in inventory and provided a customer name, email address and local telephone number.



Pied Piper then evaluated how the dealerships responded by email, telephone and text message over the next 24 hours.

The consultancy also sent in-person mystery shoppers into dealerships nationwide, measuring how effectively the dealership interacted in-person about electrified offerings, as well as whether the dealership acknowledged and built upon the online shopping that the “customer” had already completed.

“The shopping path from website to dealership plays an even more critical role for EV customers,” O’Hagan says. “EV customers need to understand how they can benefit from EV ownership.”

Two-thirds of such customers are first-time electrified-vehicle buyers, which requires more work on the part of dealerships in familiarizing them with the product, he adds. “It’s different from a customer buying a fifth Honda Accord. There’s not a lot a dealer has to do there. But it’s completely different with a first-time EV customer.”

He cites “lots of variation” in the timeliness of dealer responses. “Not every brand is as good as the next guy.”

Most car dealers have perfected the art of selling vehicles in person, O’Hagan says. “They’ve had 100 years of practice. But some dealers still struggle with the online portion. It’s hard to get it right 100% of the time.”

Pied Piper has done benchmarking studies on brands’ in-store and online sales effectiveness since 2007, but this is the company’s first look at automotive omnichannel selling, which melds the online and in-store experience.

O’Hagan says it typically entails a customer moving from a brand website to a dealership website to a dealership visit to potentially returning home to view more websites before committing to buy either online or in person.

Another irony of the omnichannel study: Tesla, the battery-electric segment sales leader, ranks second to last in the ranking. (Lincoln occupies the cellar.)

Prioritizing Routine Maintenance for Electric Vehicles

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Car Dealer Customers, Employees Are Different Today

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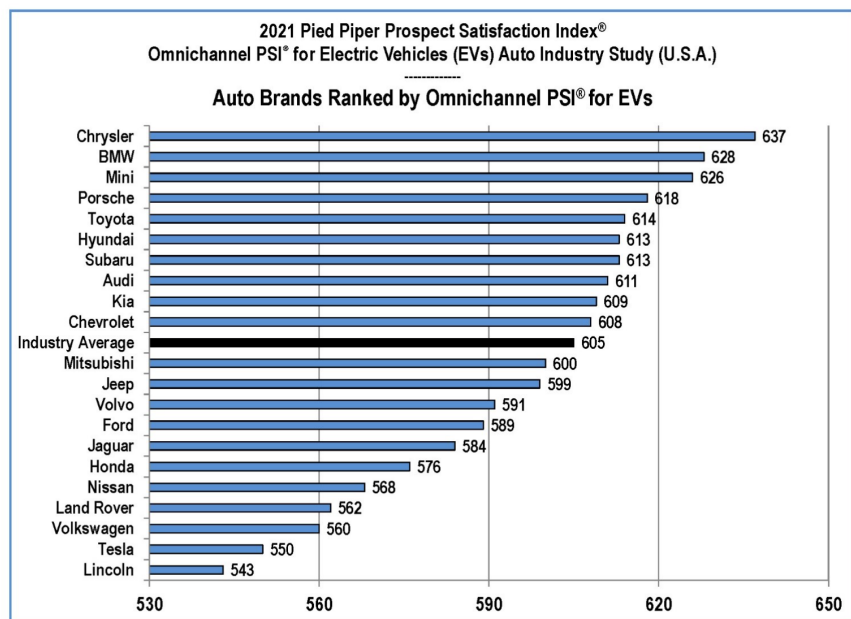
Tesla's poor showing stems from the patchy way it responded to the mystery-shopper inquiries, O'Hagan says.

"If you have (online) questions for Tesla, they don't make it easy," O'Hagan says. "They only responded within 24 hours half the time. Tesla is great for people who know what they want. But if you have a question – such as about EV maintenance, range or financing – they are not good at getting back with you."

(Tesla ranked No.1 in Pied Piper's 2019 benchmarking of brand effectiveness for in-store selling.)

Electrified-vehicle sales are growing but remain low compared with vehicles powered by internal-combustion engines. Still, the auto industry is "ramping up" for the EV age, says O'Hagan, who formerly worked for BMW. "There's definitely momentum."

Steve Finlay is a retired WardsAuto senior editor. He can be reached at Steven.Finlay1950@gmail.com.



Source: 2021 Pied Piper Omnichannel PSI® for EVs Auto Industry Study (USA)

www.piedpiperpsi.com