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Study: Large dealership groups pulling ahead in web responsiveness

Nation's largest dealer groups are pulling ahead of the pack in online customer service, a Pied Piper report finds.

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The nation's largest dealer groups are pulling ahead of the pack in online customer service, a report out Monday from [retail service tracker Pied Piper](#) found.

Pied Piper used 20 best-practice behaviors to measure the internet lead

effectiveness of 15 of the nation's largest dealership groups. These include speed and quality categories, making up 25 percent and 75 percent of a group's score, respectively.



The firm evaluated every dealership in every group represented, with the exception of automotive management services, where a sample of 50 stores was used.

Practices measured include how quickly a customer's text or email is responded to and if a "human" responds to customers when using chat functions on dealer websites.

In Pied Piper's survey, 12 out of 15 groups scored higher than the industry average. **Napleton Automotive Group**, which ranks No. 13 on the *Automotive News* list of top 150 dealership groups based in the U.S., earned the highest marks, with a score of 74 out of 100.

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Penske Automotive Group, ranking No. 3 on the *Automotive News* list, and **Berkshire Hathaway Automotive**, which does not appear on the *Automotive News* list, placed second and third, with scores of 70 and 67, respectively.

Ken Garff Automotive Group, which ranks No. 9 on the top dealership group list, came in last in the study, with a score of 48.

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The average score of the groups surveyed was 59, while the industry average score sits at 55 – meaning the nation's largest dealer groups are generally performing better than non-group stores in web responsiveness.



Fran O'Hagan, Pied Piper CEO, said that in his former career in the auto industry, the large dealer groups were rarely the best at online customer service. Now, that's changed.

"They could figure out how to buy multiple dealers, but they couldn't really figure out how to run them," O'Hagan told *Automotive News*. "That has all completely changed in the interim."

Much of the progress on the online customer service front can be attributed to the attitudes of the top brass, O'Hagan said. He said executives at dealer groups he's talked to, such as at Penske Automotive Group, are prioritizing web responsiveness.

"The key is not the employee who's doing it. The key is all the way up to the top of the organization," he said. "This part of the business is something that they recognize and work on as a top priority."

"If you talk to executives at Penske and say, 'How important is it how your dealerships respond to web customers?', they'll talk for 20 minutes about that."

Going forward, O'Hagan said web responsiveness will become more important than in-person sales, if it hasn't already.

"I think we're already there," he said. "If we do a good job with our website, we engage them. We encourage them to reach out and communicate with us."