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Napleton Automotive tops new survey on Web lead response times

Napleton Automotive topped Pied Piper's annual Web lead response time survey by relying on a centralized business development team.

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MARK HOLLMER

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When it comes to Web-related sales leads, **Napleton Automotive Group** developed a strategy to capture as many of them as possible.

Napleton chose to centralize

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most of its business development center functions into two large offices. A facility in West Palm Beach, Fla., employs roughly 60 employees to handle Web leads from Napleton's dealerships in the Southeast, working essentially like a call center. About the same number work in Merrillville, Ind., and tackle Internet sales leads from the Midwest and the eastern U.S.

"The lead will come in from Cars.com or CarGurus or ... our own websites, and it goes to the centralized call center," said Brian Napleton, the group's director of operations. "There are specialists based on each brand that we have that will respond as if they're working directly in the stores."

That strategy helped Napleton Automotive Group once again score the top spot on an annual survey from **Pied Piper Management Co.** that looked at dealership response times to customer inquiries via the Internet. Napleton scored 87 out

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of 100 – the third year in a row it has bested all others. It has also increased its score each year – including four points above its 2023 total, Pied Piper said.

Napleton Automotive Group, of Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., ranks No. 24 on Automotive News' [list of the top 150 dealership groups based in the U.S.](#), with retail sales of 28,952 new vehicles in 2023.

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Top 5

This year's Pied Piper study involved 18 of the largest dealership groups in the U.S. Berkshire Hathaway Automotive placed second at 77, up seven points from last year. Herb Chambers Auto Group and Ken Garff Automotive Group, up two points, tied for third at 76. Ganley Auto Group rounded out the top five at 74, up 13 points.

Of the six largest publicly traded auto groups, [Penske Automotive Group](#) landed in seventh place with a score of 70, down six points from 2023. [Sonic](#) and [AutoNation](#) tied for ninth place with 67 – a two-point improvement for Sonic and a one-point jump for AutoNation over last year. Among the others, [Asbury](#) scored a 66, [Group 1](#) received a 62 and Lithia 56.

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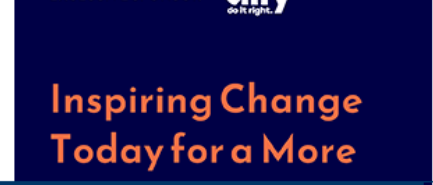
The auto dealership buy/sell market experienced a record year of buy/sell activity with 397 completed dealership transactions, up 6% compared to 2022, according to the just-released 2023 Blue Sky Report® by Kerrigan Advisors. This activity included the third largest transaction in auto retail history – the sale of Kerrigan Advisors' client, Jim Koons Automotive Companies representing 20 dealerships and the addition of \$3 billion of revenue to Asbury Automotive Group.

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Mystery shopper inquiries

Pied Piper conducted its annual study by submitting 1,535 "mystery shopper" customer website inquiries to all of the dealerships owned by the groups. The study asked a specific question about a vehicle in inventory and provided a customer name, email address and local telephone number. Pied Piper evaluated how dealerships responded by email, telephone and text message over the next 24 hours.

Pied Piper found 42 percent of dealerships scored above 80, which meant they provided a "quick and thorough personal response." On the other hand, 18 percent scored below 40, which Pied Piper said means they failed "to personally respond to their website customers."

"One out of five website customers today who inquire about a vehicle will be ghosted by the dealership," said Pied Piper CEO Fran O'Hagan. "Too often a dealership's response today is only an automated reply, the modern equivalent of a form letter."

According to Pied Piper, 84 percent of Napleton's dealerships surveyed scored over 80, with just 6 percent scoring less than 40.

The dealer group average was 66.

A more efficient approach

Close to 85 percent of Napleton's approximately 50 dealerships participate in the centralized system, Brian Napleton said.

Napleton Automotive Group began its Florida business development center operation in 2015 and launched the Indiana one in 2018, Napleton said. Centralizing the business development functions instead of having a handful of professionals handle the work at individual dealerships has boosted efficiency and also helped professionalize the position, he said.

"A regular store has a BDC manager and three or four associates under them. It's not the highest paying job in the world and the structure of a car dealership might not be the best for some of the applicants that we get ... so there's always a lot of turnover," Napleton said. "This centralizes [the department] with better training, better hours, more work-life balance, and you can do it from the home or office. We've reduced the BDC turnover by a lot."

He said the centralized approach ensures enough backups so "the stores don't lose any of the quality of their responses."

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Importantly, the centralized system helps the group personalize its activity with customers more, Napleton said.

"We've worked really hard with our [business development centers] to make sure that when a customer asks a question, we answer it. When they want several options, we give them several options," Napleton said. "It's your introduction to the store for that customer so you have to make sure that you do everything as well as you possibly can."

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