

Study Names Top Dealers in Lead Effectiveness

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Critical Shifts:

- **Napleton's Continued Dominance:** Napleton Automotive Group secured the top ranking for the fifth consecutive year, achieving a record-breaking score of 93 and widening the gap between top-tier performers and the industry average.
- **Industry-Wide Gains Driven by Multi-Channel Response:** The average ILE score rose significantly to 74, fueled by a 20% increase in text message responses and an 11% improvement in multi-channel follow-ups, signaling a shift toward more proactive digital communication.
- **The "AI Response Gap":** While AI has raised the baseline for responsiveness, it has introduced "invisible failures." Dealership scores drop by an average of 9 points when inquiries require human intervention or involve complex interactions between disparate software systems.

Napleton Automotive Group dealerships ranked highest for the fifth straight year in the 2026 Pied Piper PSI Internet Lead Effectiveness (ILE) Auto Dealer Group Study, which compared the response behaviors of 31 large auto dealer groups when receiving sales leads through their dealership websites. Following Napleton were Berkshire Hathaway Automotive, Jeff Wyler Automotive Family, MileOne Autogroup, and LaFontaine Automotive Group.

In the 2026 study, the average dealer group ILE score reached 74, up seven points from last year and three points above the overall auto industry average. Of the 31 dealer groups measured, eight improved by more than 10 points, while only three declined. These gains reflect clear behavioral shifts, including a 20% increase in responding by text, an 11% improvement in multichannel follow-up, and 6% fewer slow or unhelpful responses.

Compared to the overall auto industry, dealer groups are widening the gap. Dealer group dealerships are 10% more likely to achieve ILE scores above 80, delivering quick, thorough, and proactive responses, and 20% less likely to fall below 40, where responses fail to move customers forward.

AI automation has improved dealer responsiveness, but it also creates new ways for customer inquiries to invisibly fail. Dealerships that rely heavily on AI respond quickly to simple questions, but performance drops when inquiries require human involvement. When those "harder" questions are encountered, the typical dealership response drops an average of 9 ILE points. Breakdowns can also occur between systems, when AI interacts with DMS, website, CRM, email, text, and phone. In either case, the system may claim activity occurred while the customer still receives no useful response.

"AI is raising the baseline," said Cameron O'Hagan, Pied Piper's vice president, metrics & analytics. "The challenge is that the most important failures now happen in the gaps, between systems, or when a customer needs human help. That's where breakdowns tend to occur, and they're often invisible without independent measurement."

2026 is the fifth consecutive year of Napleton ranking first place in the annual ILE Auto Dealer Group study. Napleton further improved their average score by an additional two points in 2026, reaching a new record average ILE score of 93; their second consecutive year scoring in the 90s.