

Volkswagen dealers lead peers in service scheduling study

Volvo, Acura, BMW, Mazda and Nissan were other high performers in Pied Piper's annual study, which also found aftermarket shops outperform dealers in phone scheduling.

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A sign is posted in front of a Volkswagen dealership on Feb. 23, 2018 in San Rafael, California. Volkswagen dealerships outranked others in terms of phone performance for scheduling service visits in a study from Pied Piper. *Justin Sullivan via Getty Images*

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Volkswagen dealerships were No. 1 in a recent U.S. market research study that [measured dealership performance](#) in scheduling service appointments online and over the phone, by independent market research firm Pied Piper Management Co.

“There is a huge upside” to effective service appointments, said Fran O’Hagan, founder and CEO of Pied Piper, in a Sept. 16 phone interview. Getting service appointments right is key to retaining service customers — and in turn, retaining service customers is key to retaining sales customers, he said.

“When we go to big dealer groups and talk to senior executives, the No. 1 thing they are focused on is keeping the customer with the 3-, 4-, 5-year-old car from leaving. That’s what they’re focused on. That’s what makes this measurement so critical,” O’Hagan said.

Colorado dealer Fred Emich IV, chairman of the Volkswagen National Dealer Advisory Council, said in a separate phone interview on Sept. 16 that, on average, Volkswagen owners can afford service costs, and they tend to take good care of their vehicles.

“VW does push service-scheduling tools, and visual MPI tools. Most VW dealers are pretty active in fixed ops,” Emich said in the call. MPI stands for multi-point inspections. Volkswagen of America is also supporting a program to provide mobile service, he said.

Emich is managing partner of Denver-based Emich Automotive, which has four dealerships in Colorado, including two VW stores, and one each for Chevrolet and Kia.

In the Pied Piper study, VW-brand dealers had a score of 73 out of a possible 100. Other brands scoring highly (70 or above) were Volvo, Acura, BMW, Mazda and Nissan, the study said. The lowest scorers were Alfa Romeo (45), Ram (52), Dodge (55), Genesis (58).

Pied Piper, based in Austin, Texas, published its second annual Auto Industry Service Scheduling Effectiveness Study on Sept. 14. Besides an overall score for each brand, the study includes separate measures for online and for phone appointments. The study uses more than 40 criteria to measure how effectively dealerships help customers schedule service appointments.

The study also examined results for four major, independent service center brands: Midas, Pep Boys, Firestone, and Meineke.

On average, even though dealerships did better in overall scores, independent service centers for those four brands scored better than new-car dealerships in some important criteria, especially over the phone, O’Hagan said.

For example, he said independent shops put a service advisor on the line with the customer in an average 38 seconds versus 66 seconds for the average dealership.

In addition, the earliest available appointment when calling an independent service center was in an average of 1.3 days versus an average of 2.9 days for dealerships.

O’Hagan said phone effectiveness is still important, since around two-thirds of service appointments are still made over the phone, in spite of years of effort at OEMs and new-car dealerships to get customers to book their own appointments online, as it saves dealerships time and costs.

“The OEMs are fixated on website, on online service scheduling,” O’Hagan said.

On the other hand, he added, dealership groups were enthused when they heard the study measured both online and phone performance. Customers often prefer the phone for service visits that are more complicated than routine actions like oil changes or tire rotation, he said.

VW dealerships had the highest score in the industry on the phone, scoring 69 out of 100, according to Pied Piper’s press release. One contributing reason: VW dealerships set appointments for phone customers 91% of the time.

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