

RESEARCH

Audi ranks highest for dealer satisfaction: report

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Audi City in Berlin

By JOE MCCARTHY

The manufacturer-dealer relationship is critical in the automotive industry, and German automaker Audi regularly seeks to enhance the dynamic, earning it consistently high dealer feedback scores in a new report by Carlisle & Co.

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The auto brand received the highest scores for tech support, special tools, new models, technical training, non-tech training, warranty administration, marketing support, social media, customer retention and express lane categories. When automakers prioritize their dealer relationships, they not only sell more cars, but also improve brand image, since dealers are the last stage between a customer and her car.

"When asked which manufacturer they like to work with most, we want our dealers to choose us first without hesitation. If this is happening, we know we are on the right track," said Peter Donnellan, director of after sales, **Audi** of America.

"It is important to us that dealers understand we do not take a one-size-fits-all approach," he said.

The 2015 **Carlisle Service Manager Satisfaction Survey** went out to 17 brands and received

more than 7,000 submissions.

Changing it up

The traditional dealer model has stayed suspended for several decades: a lot full of cars and harried salesman roaming around striving to hit sales targets.

Oftentimes, the dealership is cast as a battlefield for consumers, with the dealer trying to wrangle the highest price and the consumer trying to wrangle the lowest price.



Audi Manhattan dealership

In the process, passions can flare, especially when informed consumers are involved, an increasingly common occurrence.

Such an arrangement is fundamentally at odds with how a brand approaches consumers. However, brands have traditionally maintained a tenuous connection to dealers, only supplying cars and letting them handle the rest.

This hands-off approach can insulate brands from being castigated by consumers, but it also does not improve consumer sentiment.

Audi has tried to change this relationship in several ways.

First, the brand takes an active role in training salesmen to ensure that they best represent brand interests.



Audi City Berlin

Next, they provide ongoing support and incentives to the dealer.

Most importantly, the automaker has sought to incorporate technology into every step of the buying process for both consumers and salesmen.

Raising the bar

As Audi of America unifies the digital strategy of its independent dealers, customers are given greater control of their buying experience, according to an Audi executive.

In the past, Audi's more-than 280 dealers in the United States played a large role in shaping the online experience, resulting in uneven and disjointed experiences, but the brand is switching to a consistent digital strategy that lets online interactions flow seamlessly into any dealer experience. Far from hurting dealer autonomy, the new approach has resulted in empowered sales associates and a greater feeling of brand community ([see story](#)).

Also, Audi of America recently demonstrated an interactive digital screen at the Los Angeles Auto Show that will likely become, in one form or another, a common asset within dealerships and showrooms.

The 10- by 25-foot interactive mural is composed of eight distinct screens that merge to form one cohesive layout. As consumers continue to shift the bulk of their purchase journey online, automakers will respond with digitized retail environments that seamlessly bring cross-channel interactions together ([see story](#)).

"We understand each individual dealer has its own needs, and we need to treat each accordingly," Mr. Donnellan said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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