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Ironic? Women Now Accelerate Customer Service at Car Dealerships

Mercedes-Benz, Honda, BMW Score Lead National Survey ; Plus 5 Trends for Top-Notch Service

PITTSBURGH, PA. – Women are the fastest growing segment of car buyers at car dealerships, spending billions of dollars annually on new and used cars, as well as car service and maintenance. They're more confident, educated, and prepared to make smart car decisions than ever before, and thanks to dealer rating websites like Women-Drivers.com, Facebook, Twitter and other online outlets, women are also voicing their opinions on those decisions in greater numbers.

They are finally catching the attention of car dealers, for good reason. Recent findings by the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association show 9 out of 10 women are involved in their household's vehicle maintenance and repair decision-making process. Industry experts say that 65-70% of the customers taking cars in for service and repair are women. The landscape of the traditional male-oriented and male-dominated dealership is changing.

“Car dealerships have to treat women respectfully or they risk sending customers to their nearest competitor – another dealership, or an independent specialty or ‘big box’ auto repair store,” says Anne Fleming, President of Women-Drivers.com. The car dealer review site is a marketplace connecting women to dealerships that already promote trust and transparency, as demonstrated through their Women Satisfaction Index® (WSI) scores. “Our service reviews underscore the bottom line for women – when they are treated respectfully and have a good experience, they return to that dealership again and again.”

This is no surprise to dealerships, as customer retention is critical to their business. Vehicle owners visit a dealership's service lane two to three times a year. The more a customer comes back the higher the likelihood they will not only return for service in the future, but will also purchase their next car there.

Women-Drivers.com's Top 10 Dealer Brands for Women's Experience with Service & Maintenance

Women-Drivers.com's mid-year WSI® Service scores, indicated by nearly 1,400 reviews (in which 5 is the highest possible rating) showcase the top women-friendly brands – Mercedes-Benz (4.70), Honda (4.64), BMW (4.60), Acura (4.43), Lexus (4.42), Buick and GMC (4.25), Jeep (4.22), Toyota (4.17) and Chrysler (4.09). Paying close attention to their customer satisfaction performance is paying off. The midyear report showed:

- 73% of women said they will service their car at the dealership in the future
- 53% said they have their car service work completed at the same dealership where they purchased their car
- 66% of the women received follow-up communication from the dealership after the work was completed

“Women recognize that Mercedes-Benz is the leader in the luxury car business ... At Jack Ingram Motors we take pride in establishing relationships with our customers, which is why customer service is our number one priority, and we know that women pay close attention to the level of service they receive from their Mercedes dealership. We are also proud to say that both our parts and service managers are women,” says Dick Bennett, Mercedes-Benz General Manager at Jack Ingram Motors, Inc. in Montgomery, Alabama.

All top 10 car brands earned high scores from women respondents asked to rate their experience on nine service issues, including everything from the ease of scheduling a visit and the cleanliness of the car after servicing, to how closely estimates matched the charged total, the quality of the work, and whether they were treated with respect.

Room to Improve – Negative Data Trends

Many brands remain below the top 10 with lots of room yet to improve regarding customer service and satisfaction. Women-Drivers.com's research across all brands reflects forthcoming feedback from women on their dealership service department experiences. Highlights include:

- 41% were dissatisfied with their last experience
- 34% didn't like the way the service advisor spoke to them or the way they were treated
- 33% said that their problem wasn't resolved to their satisfaction
- 23% thought the dealership was lacking in concierge services
- 22% said the dealerships hours weren't convenient

For those that said they would no longer use their originating service department:

- 69% said they would have their car serviced at the dealership if they were provided with a courtesy vehicle
- 41% wanted the dealership to have more amenities like a child play area, Internet and wireless capability, or a television

5 Features of Top-Notch Customer Service

Five variables are utilized, in part or in whole, by forward-thinking dealerships with extraordinarily high loyalty and retention rates with women consumers. They are:

1. **More Women in the Workplace:** Over 18% of women working at car dealerships and many are in the position of service advisor, the first line of contact with the dealership's customers. These dealerships realize that seeing a knowledgeable woman behind the service counter makes female customers more comfortable to ask questions concerning repairs.
2. **Using Technology to Communicate Repair Needs:** Most dealers continue to focus on "verbal selling" instead of "visual selling." Women, many of whom are skeptical of "up sells at the dealership" decline the additional or unforeseen recommendation over 40% of the time. Why? Customers want proof to ensure that the repair is warranted – and, when they cannot see the problem many opt out, and may even feel suspicious about it.

Companies like ClearMechanic.com develop technology for automotive dealerships including mobile apps, expert illustration content and web-based tools to "visually explain" repairs with real-time photos and videos. Customers and dealerships alike see this as win-win. Dealerships that use this "proof-based" technology have a 20-40% increase in success on additional service recommendations while their customer retention rates and CSI scores improve.

3. **Go Beyond TV:** Make the service waiting area into places where women are comfortable spending time, especially mothers with children. A relaxed and friendly atmosphere with comfortable seating, WiFi connectivity, and flat-screen TVs are a start. The warmth of the waiting area, the types of magazines provided and the wall colors also enhance the space. Provide hot and cool beverages and a children's designated play center. Allow for free transportation services so women can run errands while waiting for their car to be finished. Where possible, allow for courtesy overnight vehicles – this concierge service is employed by luxury brands and can have a real impact on women using a dealership, so trickle-down brands and dealerships take note.

4. **Expand Hours:** According to the National Automobile Dealers Association, the average service department is open 56 hours a week compared to an 80 hour average for a specialty car repair chain store. With 40% of children today being born to unwed mothers and 29.5% of households run by single parents, dealerships that expand their hours are expanding their customer base.¹
5. **The Golden Rule:** Put a highly trained listener into the position of Service Advisor – the professional who can hear not only what women are actually saying, but also be interested in what they aren't saying. Abandon the role as the know-it-all automotive expert and strive to support and educate women throughout the entire sales process. Treat women with respect and treat them as the savvy consumers they are.

Without question, customer service and customer satisfaction are being re-defined by women car buyers and dealerships alike. Women value relationships and trust car dealers who focus on building a long-term relationship, not just making a sale. Every dealership should strive to be identified as a dealership that women trust, since providing superior service to its women customers means that same level of service to **all** of customers.

¹<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1337.pdf>

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About Women-Drivers.com Women-Drivers.com is a marketplace connecting women buyers to trusted *Certified Women-Drivers Friendly™ Car Dealers* and encourages extraordinary commercial experiences and lasting relationships between these two groups. Women-Drivers.com is a producer of women+family content and publishes a platform of integration services that build and engage Facebook communities for car dealers. The Company provides web-based marketing solutions that build trust and transparency, resulting in greater sales and servicing from women. Follow on Twitter @womendrivers.