

Are Women's Car Buying Experiences Different than Men's?

It's a mistake to believe they see the situation from the same perspective

by Gerry Myers

I initially visited your dealership on a Friday evening by myself. I am a female, age 44, and it took approximately 30 minutes for any salesman to ask me if I would like some help. I had every intention of purchasing a car on that date and I would suggest that perhaps your salesmen think about how they react to single women.”

“Men are treated much better. My wife was not waited on the two times she was looking at cars on the lot. If I pull up on the lot, I am immediately waited on.”

When you read these quotes – from real male and female dealership customers – did you immediately dismiss them as something that couldn't happen in your dealership? If so, are you sure?

These car-buyer quotes, obtained by MarketQuiz, an online market research company that specializes in the automotive industry, help make an important point: Do you pay attention to how women are treated in your stores – or just assume that “those things don't happen anymore?”

Are you wondering just what your customers say about you and your dealership once they leave your dealership? Read more to find out what men and women think about their car buying experiences, the sales associates who helped – or didn't help them – and their service-area experiences.

Last month, this column focused on women car buyers. This month I want to show some of the similarities and differences in the responses of men and women who shop for vehicles at dealerships like yours.

The survey says

One of the most telling questions asked in the survey pointed out that while approximately half (females, 50 percent; males, 43 percent) of new car buyers go car shopping with their spouses, nearly half (45 percent) of men go alone while only 12 percent of women do. More than twice as many women took a male friend car shopping with them as compared to men (women, 15 percent; men, 7 percent).

Whereas a few men didn't believe women were treated any differently in dealerships than men, the majority didn't hold that opinion. Some comments from the surveyed respondents were:

- Men are treated with more respect. It shouldn't be that way, but it typically is from what I hear from female friends.
- Most salespeople are going to talk to the man, even with a woman present.

- I believe females who do not have a lot of knowledge about buying a car can and will be taken advantage of.
- Salesmen usually direct all comments to me, rather than my wife.
- Men are still (unjustly) perceived to understand more about buying cars.

According to some men, men are treated better, but to a lesser extent as time moves on. Obviously it isn't just women who feel females are undervalued, neglected, taken advantage of and not respected as car-buying decision makers.

What buyers want

Men and women want many of the same traits from their sales associate: professional, knowledgeable, friendly, honest, straightforward and helpful. Both men and women used these words to describe the qualities of the salespeople they would recommend again. Too pushy, made too many trips to the sales manager and bringing their personal problems into the conversation were reasons salespeople got "No" votes. Another common complaint was that, after the sale, the sales associate didn't return their calls. But the good news is that a number of both genders said they would recommend their sales associate.

Even though men slightly preferred a salesman to a saleswoman, more than 85 percent of both genders were comfortable with either one as long as they were knowledgeable and trustworthy.

While my experience doesn't suggest this to be the case, in this survey, men complained about the service department more than women. Some respondents' comments were, for instance:

- When I buy a car, I interview the service department first, and then I test-drive the car. If the service department is horrible, I don't buy there.
- The service department was not concerned with me until they found out I knew the owner.
- After-sales service was poor.

Women also dislike poor service, and they take it more personally. One woman replied: "I asked my service person how much he expected the service to cost and he said he would let me know but did not. When I went to pay I was charged double what the written labor estimate was. I was very disappointed and felt they tried to swindle me because I am young and female. I will not go to (name of dealership) for any other repairs."

Buyers dislike – and like

The general consensus was that neither men nor women liked:

- The sales associate running back and forth to the manager
- Being bribed to do the manufacturer's survey
- High-pressure sales tactics.

Both men and women enjoyed:

- Honest, knowledgeable, courteous salespeople
- Being appreciated and valued as a customer
- Work being done when promised
- Service and salespeople who respected their time
- Loaner cars.

Other notable recommendations were:

- Train the sales staff
- Listen more...talk less
- Improve the buying experience by eliminating games
- Realize women are knowledgeable consumers even when they buy a car
- Know that customer service is the key
- E-mail me service reminders, recalls, product information, etc.
- Review your Web site. Is it customer-friendly or could it stand improvement?
- Treat me (customer) like you would like to be treated.

While this article showcases a lot of similarities between men and women buyers, it would be a mistake for dealers not to realize that there are also many subtle differences in the genders' thought processes and buying patterns. Learning more about female customers is not only a good business practice; it is also a necessary step toward making your dealership more profitable in the 21st century.