

Understanding the Female Customer

Survey reveals what women car-buyers want

by Gerry Myers

Believing that women are the best source to gain information on the female consumer, I contracted with MarketQuiz, an e-mail-based survey and marketing company for auto dealers, to conduct a survey of buying experiences, preferences and opinions. Because the survey was e-mail-based, I had a response rate of 43 percent in less than two weeks. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were male; 48 percent were female.

My main reason for conducting the survey was to gather data for dealers so they could better serve their customers, both men and women. This article deals with responses of only female car buyers. Next month I will compare the responses of men and women.

Below is a glimpse for owners, general managers and sales managers who need to know:

- What is important to their customers when purchasing a vehicle?
- Why would/wouldn't a customer recommend a particular sales associate again?
- Why would/wouldn't they recommend the dealership?

The results from my survey were amazing, informative and eye opening.

Perception is reality

Because of their treatment or the perception women have of the way they are treated in dealerships, 50 percent of women shopping for a vehicle go with their husbands, while 23 percent go with other family members. Fifteen percent ask male friends to accompany them, whereas only 12 percent go alone.

It is a misnomer that women prefer women salespeople, although they do like to do business with dealerships that hire women for sales and service positions. Only 6 percent of the women surveyed said they preferred a saleswoman. The exact same percentage said they preferred a salesman. Eighty-eight percent said it didn't matter.

What is important are the traits, attitudes and knowledge of the salesperson. The vast majority said they wanted a sales associate who:

- Was honest. Honesty was mentioned numerous times, along with knowledge and integrity.
- Was not pushy. Being patient and respectful was sighted as qualities important to women.
- Took time to guide them through the process, answer their questions and treat them with respect.
- Was proactive, without being bothersome. "I want someone to contact/tell me information that I need to know, but didn't think to ask."

Women expressed displeasure with good ol' boys who related more to their husbands and who left them sitting in their office stewing while "playing negotiation games."

What about gender treatment?

Is one gender treated better than the other? When asked this, both men and women felt there was a difference. One woman commented, “Sadly, that is why I bring a male friend with me.”

An overwhelming number of women believe that salespeople (male or female) assume men:

- Know more than women do about cars and financing.
- Are the decision makers and are taken more seriously.
- Are not taken advantage of as often as women.

Some female buyers think it is the woman’s fault for not being properly prepared or lacking confidence. While this may sometimes be the case, salespeople are still losing the sale by not instilling confidence, taking the time needed and being upfront and honest.

What women tell their friends

What are women shoppers telling their friends about your salespeople? Whether they are giving referrals or not, women are talking to their friends, family and colleagues about their car buying experience. If you don’t know how your customers feel, maybe you should survey them and find out.

Women replying to the survey said they were pleased with their sales associate because he/she:

- Used no gimmicks and gave straight answers.
- Was courteous and knowledgeable, listened to concerns and understood when told the buyer needs time to think about the deal.
- Was polite, helpful, friendly, straightforward, patient, attentive, knowledgeable and went that extra mile.
- Gave the impression he was interested in helping, not just selling a vehicle.
- Wasn’t pushy. He let us take our time and never said, “If you don’t act now...”
- Respected me—and my time.

Women said they wouldn’t refer their sales associate if they:

- Felt too pressured.
- Didn’t take care of minor problems after the sale.
- Made too many trips to the sales manager during negotiations.
- Talked too much about their personal lives.
- Didn’t follow through—dropped the ball a lot.
- Felt he was arrogant, pushy, inexperienced.

How to get more referrals

What can you do to get more referrals? If your salespeople aren’t getting referrals, especially from female customers, do you know why? Are they not asking for referrals? Don’t understand the value? Are they too pushy or incompetent? While 47 percent of

those surveyed said they would definitely recommend their sales associate and 23 percent said they probably would, only 37 percent actually had. Why such a large gap?

According to Sunny Fraser, MarketQuiz vice president of sales, conducting e-mail-based surveys coupled with e-mail marketing programs give dealers invaluable data and tools to reconnect with their customers routinely, unobtrusively and cost effectively.

“For our dealer clients, we have substantially increased CSI scores, customer retention, and overall revenue in the dealership by improving the customer experience through e-mail,” Fraser said.

In addition to marketing efforts, train your sales staff to ask for referrals ...and on several different occasions. At the time of the sale or delivery, salespeople should ask customers, “Were you happy with your car buying experience? Do you know of someone else in the market for a similar vehicle? I would be pleased to help them as well.” After the sale, send buyers a personal thank you note, reiterating your desire to help their friends and family, and include a couple additional business cards. Keep your name in front of them by sending birthday, anniversary and other cards to denote special occasions. Give them an extra business card to pass on.

Try these techniques to make your time with the customer into a relationship, not a one-time transaction sale:

- E-mail tips on maintaining their vehicle.
- Remind them to pop in to say “hi” if you see them in the service area.

This may seem very time consuming, but in reality once you have the process in place it doesn't take long to implement. In fact, it takes far less time than cultivating new customers from “ups.”