

Keeping up to the marque

The results of the SA AutoBrand 2011 Survey suggest that great service - both before and after a vehicle sale - is the most powerful way to enhance the reputation of a marque. When it comes to buying a car, a good experience at time of purchase coupled with excellent after-sales care and reliable vehicle servicing, are the most influential factors when it comes to brand perception.

The inaugural survey, produced by RamsayMedia Research Solutions (RMRS), measures customers' satisfaction, as well as their needs and factors influencing purchase in respect of every automotive brand and model currently on the market.

Responses from 5700 people indicated that around 45% of car dealers of all marques are good at offering test drives, giving the customer the exact vehicle they want to purchase and ensuring any specification requests are met at the time of sale. However, few dealers do the little extras that make all the difference to customers' overall experience and their ultimate perception of the brand.

"It seems dealers are getting the basics right. However, only 19% of sellers give their customers pleasant surprises - such as a bottle of bubbly or a car cleaning kit - at time of sale, follow up after the sale or offer good trade-in deals," says RMRS partner Alan Todd. "This suggests there is plenty of scope for dealers to go the extra mile for their clients and that doing so would be perceived positively."

When asked about vehicle servicing, survey respondents said that across all auto brands, service staff are generally friendly and respectful and ensure that the car being serviced is cleaned properly and ready on time.

"However, respondents found that service staff seldom repair things correctly the first time and very few offer a vehicle collection and return service or a courtesy car. By and large, the sentiment is that dealers don't keep their promises at service time and they don't offer reasonable service charges," Todd continues.

"Results like these show that a focus on good service is appreciated, and also that poor service is noted and affects brand perception in the long run," points out Andrew Stodel, GM of RMRS.

Survey results available now

The survey is the first major product from RMRS and draws on over 25 years' research experience in the automotive industry through partners Todd and Gordon Hooper, who also head up Bateleur Research Solutions. As publisher of nine special-interest magazines, including Car and Leisure Wheels, the company is able to bring its knowledge of the South African motor vehicle market as well as its multi-platform reader audiences to the table, in order to offer this new turnkey research solution for marketers.

Which vehicle brands are the most loved in SA? Which marques have the most and least professional staff? How do respondents rate quality, fuel economy, resale value? Which dealers have the best after-sales service? With insights on 18 leading marques, the results of the survey are available now.

Future industry-specific surveys in the pipeline include a survey of the country's most affluent consumers commissioned by UCT's Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, the travel and hospitality survey and others. The company can also produce a bespoke online research solution for a specific interest sector or market.

For more information, go to www.ramsaymedia.co.za.

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