

How good is your training?

by Toby Procter

This year the research firm Trend Tracker piloted the first ever independent survey of UK franchised auto retailers' satisfaction with the short sales training courses offered by carmakers.

As a whole the findings of this first Trend Tracker 2008 Automotive Sales Training Satisfaction Survey make cheerful reading for manufacturers, but they also reveal a 20 percentage-point gap between the best and the worst franchises. Most significant, the results indicate where each manufacturer is most in need of improving specific aspects of their sales training provision.

Conducted independently, this pilot survey included the views of nearly 40 auto retailers, using structured telephone interviews with sales managers; asking them to assess their main franchise's short sales training course provision according to 60 detailed criteria, as Excellent, Good, Average, Fair or Poor.

Toyota tops

One finding sticks out a mile: on average, franchised retailers of all brands are happy to rate sales training provision as 'good', with a median satisfaction rating of 75.5%.

Another finding is perhaps not surprising: the highest scoring sales training provider is Toyota, with a rating 10 percentage points above the industry average. Toyota is followed by six other above-average performers with Honda and Skoda in second and third places.

It seems that the quality of training provision is closely associated with the other attributes that build satisfaction with franchises – and maybe not coincidentally, with customer satisfaction, too. The top performers in this sales training survey are uncannily close to the findings of consumer CSI and vehicle reliability ratings.

The range and content of sales training courses is a major factor in their effectiveness. The survey asked for opinions on ten different aspects of course range and content, including the information and advice made available on courses, and their suitability for staff progressing from basic to advanced learning stages. Toyota and Honda came first and second in this respect, as in the overall training satisfaction rankings.

How well course content is delivered was the subject of eleven of Trend Tracker's survey questions, covering trainers' subject expertise and experience, professional attitude, communication skills, use of practical examples, the effectiveness of group-based tasks, role-plays, opportunities for individual instruction, and equipment used.

In this field, as in four others, Toyota led the pack (and came second in course content).

Other questions asked retailers about

administrative arrangements and training locations, residential facilities and other practicalities. They were also asked about post-course follow-up, and for information about dealerships' training policies and expenditure, including their use of independent suppliers for sales training.

One finding that surprised Trend Tracker researchers was that only one-fifth of sales managers could confirm what their training budget was.

Independent trainers

Retailers for only one franchise, Nissan, said some of the independent sales trainers they used provided lower quality training than manufacturers' staff. While Peugeot retailers indicated that independents provided better quality sales training.



Training satisfaction

Analysis of total survey responses showed that the range and content of courses, training materials and the quality of delivery were, in descending order, the weightiest factors for dealers in assessing training quality. These accounted for 51% of all 'marks' available to providers.

For individual providers, Trend Tracker provides breakdowns of satisfaction ratings which show them where they most need to improve performance and precisely which actions will yield the most results.

Dealerships from 12 of the 15 franchises represented in the survey send 80% or more of their showroom staff on manufacturer training courses. With sales staff churn traditionally a major problem for dealers, sales training is an ongoing commitment beyond the demands of new model launches.

Following this pilot survey Trend Tracker intends to run a full-scale sales training survey in 2009. The company also hopes to conduct an aftersales training survey.

■ Author Toby Procter is a director of Trend Tracker (www.trendtracker.co.uk)