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2005 Synovate Quality Awards

SURVEY DRIVES CAR MANUFACTURERS TO DO EVEN BETTER

Synovate's Product Quality Survey or PP100 forms part of the company's Competitive Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI), a multi-faceted study conducted for the motor industry in South Africa.

The study was first conducted in 1991, and 55 000 car owners and drivers are interviewed in South Africa each year to measure their satisfaction with various aspects relating to the ownership experience.

"The knowledge gained from these interviews then fuels the continuous efforts of manufacturers to improve their levels of service, and the actual product," said Albert McLean, Synovate's Chief Operating Officer for the Middle East and Africa. "While the prime motivation behind this is profit – a satisfied customer is a loyal customer – the motoring public clearly stands to gain as service levels and product quality in the South African industry is extremely competitive in the international context."

Such is the confidence of the industry that their products are of a standard good enough to be exposed to public scrutiny that they agreed to the publishing of the Quality Awards. Synovate awards the Quality Awards on an annual basis in recognition of outstanding quality, identifying the best performers in each vehicle segment (segments being based on body shape, size and price).

But how are the best performers identified? "PP100 is a black-and-white measure, and is quite literally a count of the number of problems new car owners experience with their vehicles in the first few months of ownership," said McLean.

Owners are given a chance to get to know their vehicle for three months, and are then interviewed to ascertain exactly what has gone wrong. A narrow window of time is used for the interviewing – vehicles may be no older than five months old at the time of the interview.

The questionnaire is structured in a drill-down fashion. Respondents are asked whether they experienced problems in 16 broad categories, as listed below.

Noise Levels: Wind noise, squeaks and rattles, road noise

Static Functional Aspects:Water leaks, dust leaks, ventilation system and functional problems

Dynamic Functional Aspects:Steering and handling, gearbox, brakes and handbrake, mechanical and performance, suspension and drive shaft

Appearance: Seats and their covering, interior, exterior paint, exterior bodywork and mouldings

Should a respondent indicate that a problem has been experienced in one of the above listed categories, the interviewer will then take them through an exhaustive list of potential problems within that category, to ascertain exactly where the problem was. This list was drawn up in conjunction with motor industry engineers, and has been carefully tailored to the unique conditions of South Africa.

“In order to achieve a quantifiable, comparable measure of quality, these problems are then summed up to achieve a total problem count,” said McLean. “But experience and common sense tells us that while this may be a true count, there are other factors to take into account.”

Take the example of model A, which has had very few functional problems, but has perhaps had a flaw in the paint used. These flaws alone could tally up to one problem for each vehicle. Since the research represents the results as the number of problems per one hundred vehicles (hence the name PP100), this will reflect as 100 PP100 for model A.

While this may not be desirable, compare this to model B. As can happen, a fault has crept into the brake system for Model B, and 80% of the owners experience some degree of brake failure. This would then reflect as 80 PP100 for model B.

At face value, with the 100 for model A exceeding the 80 problems for model B, model A would be judged to have the better quality – but few people would agree that a paint flaw is the equivalent of brake failure.

In order to overcome this, Synovate implements a system of weights, known as the Customer Irritation Factor (CIF). The CIF weights are a representation of the degree of irritation, inconvenience or dissatisfaction a particular problem will have on the customer. In the example, brakes, which are a significant safety issue, would be heavily weighted, while the comparably minor paint flaw would be down-weighted – in effect reducing the impact this would have on the total tally of problems.

“Having achieved this overall count of problems for each model and converted this to a total per one hundred vehicles, the scores by model are then directly comparable. The Quality Awards then identify the achievements made by the top three performers in each vehicle segment,” said McLean.

Given that this is the second time the PP100 results have been published in SA, it is interesting to note the degree of change. For the Sales and Service Survey, publication of the results seemed to add additional impetus to improve, and the same is very likely on PP100.

Particularly interesting is the eternal battle for supremacy between BMW and Mercedes-Benz. These two nameplates were tied for first place amongst the local manufacturers in 2004, while BMW edged ahead in 2005. Mercedes-Benz and Toyota now share second place as the best local manufacturer in the most recent results. BMW also topped the best luxury brand category ahead of Audi and Volvo who shared the second position in 2005. The new entrant, Honda, removed Toyota from its top position in 2004 amongst the volume producers. Toyota and Renault were second and third respectively, in this category in 2005.

Toyota maintained its dominate position in the LCV segments in 2005, through achieving first place in all four categories, including the best overall LCV brand. Ford managed to gain some limelight in the diesel segment, through a shared first position with Toyota. Nissan achieved a second position in both

the petrol and diesel categories. Isuzu / Opel and Ford shared the second position in the Best LCV brand category.

New Brands included in 2005 Survey: Honda, Peugeot, Renault & Chevrolet

“In order to ensure credibility and the highest possible quality, Synovate sets high standards for the data behind the quality awards,” said McLean. “The first step in achieving this is ensuring that sufficient owners are interviewed for each model to provide a statistically reliable score. This ‘quota’ is based on sales volumes, and while the ideal would be to include all models available on the market, including the low volume sellers could compromise the quality of the results overall.”

Whilst frustrating for those who commission the research, as well as the general public, the lower volumes amongst some of the returning brands has made it impossible to include these and maintain the reliability of the data.

As some of the brands have re-established themselves and volumes have reflected this, it has been possible in the latest results to include some newcomers to the PP100 Survey:

- Honda
- Peugeot
- Renault
- Chevrolet

The entry of these brands certainly did not go unnoticed. Honda raced right to the top of the volume brands podium, whilst Renault was not far behind in third place. Chevrolet also made its mark, receiving awards in both the Entry category (Spark 5-dr tied in first place) and the Small Hatch segment (Aveo 5-door tied for second place).

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About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs almost 5,000 staff in 46 countries. Synovate in South Africa was formerly known as Proactive Insight.

More information on Synovate can be found at www.synovate.com and www.synovate.co.za

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