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Spokesperson: Jon Salters, Synovate's Managing Director for Sub-Saharan Africa

Pinpointing Satisfaction requires technical expertise!

JOHANNESBURG (April 3, 2006) – “Satisfaction” is a pretty black-and-white issue – either you’re happy or you aren’t. But if you want to compare the satisfaction levels of over 50 000 customers, and determine which motor manufacturer’s dealerships best met their needs – as you can imagine, things get a lot more complicated.

Global market research company Synovate recently presented The Synovate Quality Awards. These awards are presented bi-annually – Sales and Service Satisfaction awards are presented in March and Product Quality awards are presented in October of each year.

The results of these recently presented Synovate Quality Awards are drawn from Synovate’s annual Competitive Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI) measure, a customer-driven survey which reports on sales and service satisfaction levels in the South African motor industry. The survey has two primary components – sales (did the dealership meet their new car customers’ needs) and service (the service departments’ performance as rated by their customers).

The achievements of the various brands have been outlined separately, but this has raised interest in how we can take a touchy-feely customer’s perception and experience and transform this into a concrete, statistically-sound measure.

Introduction – what does the survey aim to do, and why?

A common belief in SA is that, during the years of isolation, very little attention was paid to service levels – after all, if there is no competition, why bother? Jon Salters, Synovate’s Managing Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, explains that this is certainly not true of the motor industry. “The majority of manufacturers have invested considerably in both internal, proprietary service level measures, as well as participating in the CCSI. This study, which sees in excess of 55 000 customers contacted annually to discuss their vehicles, gives the participating manufacturers a comprehensive, actionable measure of how they are performing in this competitive arena. As a result, the industry as a whole compares very favourably in the global market.”

What brands do we measure?

The survey covers all the manufacturers who are affiliated with the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (Naamsa) and Synovate attempts to include those not affiliated. With Naamsa accounting for approximately 95% of vehicle sales in South Africa, the survey provides a very comprehensive view of the vehicle market. Each of these manufacturers provides Synovate with lists of all their customers – lists which are then carefully scrutinised and subjected to external audits where necessary. While there are a handful of brands not included, the volumes sold by these is typically quite low, making a reliable measure difficult to achieve.

Whom do we speak to?

For the Sales component of the research, new car and bakkie buyers are interviewed and asked about their experience at the dealership. Only private buyers are interviewed, and they are contacted within 20 to 30 days of the handover of their vehicle so that the experience is still fresh in their minds.

The Service Index ranks the brands based on how satisfied their customers were when servicing a vehicle at the dealership. These are again based on perceptions of private customers, who must have personally dealt with the dealership during the service.

The contact is made by telephonic interview – making SA quite unique as similar research globally is often undertaken via mailed questionnaires. However, despite the higher cost associated with telephonic interviewing, the far higher quality of the end results is deemed worthwhile.

How accurate are the results?

While the 'ideal' would be to speak to every single customer, considering the sheer volumes in an industry such as this, it is not feasible or even possible. But because of these volumes, if reliable sampling methods (enabled by telephonic interviewing) are used, it is possible to get a very accurate measure by speaking to only a predetermined sample of the population. Salters adds, "Synovate has extensive measures in place to ensure that the results are a very accurate reflection of the market. This is particularly important of late, as improvements in the industry have seen very little difference reported between many of the top performers. Statistical tools are used to ensure that only statistically significant differences are reported as such. With telephone response rates as high as 96%, we can be sure that there is little room for error in the results."

What aspects of the experience are covered?

Additional research is conducted regularly to ensure that the measurement tool, the questionnaire, measures the most crucial aspects of service delivery at the present time. The questions cover various areas of the experience, as detailed below:

Sales CSI

- General Impression
- The Salesperson
- Pricing
- Financing
- Availability
- Hand-Over
- Post-Sale
- Recommendation & Retention

Service CSI

- Appearance
- Telephone and Reception Staff

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- Quality of Service Staff and Attitude
- Pricing and Invoicing
- Collection of the Vehicle
- Post-Service
- Recommendation & Retention

“With 15 years of this research under our belt (with the continued support of the manufacturers and the industry body) have seen South Africa emerge as the frontrunner in measuring satisfaction in the motor industry” Salters says.

-ENDS-

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 over 5,000 staff in 50 countries.

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

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