

J.D. Power and Associates Reports: Ace Hardware Ranks Highest in Customer Satisfaction Among Home Improvement Retailers for a Third Consecutive Year

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WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA USA

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif., May 28 /PRNewswire/ -- For a third consecutive year, Ace Hardware ranks highest in satisfying home improvement retail store customers, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2009 Home Improvement Retail Store Study(SM) released today.

(Logo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20050527/LAF028LOGO-a>)

The study, now in its third year, measures customer satisfaction with home improvement retail stores, based on performance in five factors: merchandise; price; sales staff; sales/promotions; and store facility.

Ace Hardware achieves a score of 792 on a 1,000-point scale and performs particularly well in the sales staff and store facility factors. Lowe's (779) and Menards (774) follow Ace Hardware in the rankings. Lowe's performs particularly well in merchandise, while Menards performs well in the sales/promotions and price factors.

The study finds that approximately one-half of shoppers (51%) asked the sales staff for assistance during their most recent visit to a home improvement retail store--down from 61 percent in 2008. The two most common reasons customers ask for assistance are for help locating a product or for additional information about a product.

The study also finds that the importance of the store facility factor has increased considerably from 2008, while the importance of the price and sales/promotions factors has decreased. Although the sales staff factor decreased in importance, it still remains as one of the most influential factors impacting customer satisfaction.

"Many home improvement store chains have had to reduce the size of their sales staff to remain competitive in this tough economy, so those chains that have a sufficient, well-trained and helpful sales staff have a competitive advantage," said Dale Haines, senior director of the real estate and construction practice at J.D. Power and Associates. "When shoppers have fewer resources to turn to for assistance, they are likely to rely more on well-organized store layouts and clear signage to find the products they're searching for, which presents another opportunity for improvement."

Overall spending on home improvement products is down this year. Additionally, customers spend approximately 76 percent of their total home improvement budget at their primary home improvement retailer. However, customers who say they are "delighted" with their primary retailer's sales staff spend an additional 4 percent of their budget at that same retailer.

"Although customers are spending less, on average, there is a financial benefit to truly delighting

them since the most highly satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal to their primary home improvement retail store," said Haines. "Every retailer may compete on price to some degree. However, those retailers that successfully combine price competitiveness with a consistently helpful and satisfying shopping experience can create a notable advantage."

The study also finds the following key patterns:

- More than one-fourth (29%) of customers report shopping at their primary home improvement retailer more than once per month. Overall, 8 percent of customers report shopping at their primary home improvement retailer once per week.
- More than 40 percent of customers report experiencing a service issue during their last store visit. The most frequently mentioned problems include: floor staff not available; floor staff not knowledgeable; and desired merchandise out of stock.

The 2009 Home Improvement Retail Store Study is based on responses from 8,186 consumers who purchased a home improvement product or service within the previous 12 months from a store that sells home improvement products. Consumers were asked to evaluate their primary home improvement retailer. The study was fielded in March and April 2009.

Overall Satisfaction Ranking

| Retail Store | Overall Satisfaction Score | Power Circle Rating |
|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Ace Hardware | 792 | 5 |
| Lowe's | 779 | 4 |
| Menards | 774 | 4 |
| True Value | 774 | 4 |
| Industry Average | 767 | 3 |
| The Home Depot | 753 | 2 |

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J.D. Power and Associates Media Relations Contacts:

John Tews; Troy, Mich.; (248) 312-4119; john.tews@jdpa.com

Syvetril Perryman; Westlake Village, Calif.; (805) 418-8103; syvetril.perryman@jdpa.com

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