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Ace Hardware Ranks Highest in Customer Satisfaction Among Home Improvement Retailers For a Seventh Consecutive Year

KEY FINDINGS

A Convenient Home Improvement Retail Location is Essential to Driving Store Traffic; Superior Sales and Service Drive Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif.: 5 June 2013 — Customer satisfaction is highest among home improvement retailers that provide a knowledgeable and readily available staff to address customer needs, according to the J.D. Power & Associates 2013 Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction Study released today.

For a seventh consecutive year, Ace Hardware ranks highest in satisfying home improvement retail store customers. Ace Hardware achieves a score of 803 on a 1,000-point scale and performs particularly well in the staff and service and store facility factors. Menards ranks second with a score of 770, and performs particularly well in the price and sales and promotions factors.

The study, now in its seventh year, measures customer satisfaction with home improvement retail stores based on performance in five factors: staff and service (including availability, courtesy, knowledge, ease of checkout and ease of returning merchandise); store facility (including ease of finding merchandise, cleanliness, store layout and design, availability of parking and convenience of store location); merchandise (including availability, variety, usefulness of product information displays and selection of brands available); price; and sales and promotions.

Staff and service is the most influential factor on customer satisfaction. For example, the average wait time for assistance at retail remains at about four minutes. However, the wait time for help varies by retailer from less than two minutes to nearly six minutes. More than 80 percent of customers request help locating a product in the store, reinforcing the importance of having a knowledgeable sales person readily available.

Overall, only 5 percent of customers experience a problem while shopping at their primary retailer; however, this varies by retailer, with the highest incidence of problems experienced at 12 percent. In 2013, return rates are down slightly year over year (42% vs. 45% of customers who returned merchandise during the past year).

“By remaining focused on meeting customer needs through superior sales staff and service, home improvement retailers have the opportunity to leverage a positive customer experience into an increased share of wallet and more customer advocates,” said

Christina Cooley, director of the home improvement industries practice at J.D. Power & Associates.

According to the study, on average 27 percent of customers say they “definitely will” purchase at their primary retailer again, and 30 percent “definitely will” recommend the retailer to others. However, among the highest ranked retailers these percentages go as high as 32 percent and 43 percent, respectively.

The average amount customers spend per visit is slightly lower in 2013 at \$1,626, compared with \$1,719 in 2012, making the competition to capture a greater share of wallet more fierce. Customers spend an average of 73 percent of their annual spend at their primary home improvement retailer.

While location is a primary driver for customers to select a home improvement retail store, it’s an outstanding experience that keeps them coming back to the store. Notably, retailers performing below average have a higher rate of customers purchasing online at the store’s website compared with higher-performing retailers. Though spend through any channel is positive, this may also indicate that when customers are not satisfied with a retailer’s in-store experience they may avoid going to the store altogether or choose another retailer with better sales and staff service. Retailers may also miss out on the ancillary purchases made once a customer is in the store.

“Home improvement retailers are continually looking for alternative ways to stay competitive and gain a larger share of wallet,” said Cooley. “Before you can satisfy a customer, you have to create a compelling reason for them to come in the door. Once they arrive, you have many opportunities to delight them with staff assistance and store services.”

For consumers, J.D. Power & Associates offers the following shopping ideas:

- Do-it-yourself (DIY) customers may pick up important tips to streamline their project by visiting a home improvement retail store, where they can receive the necessary assistance and guidance to successfully complete their project.
- When planning a budget for a home improvement project, add 10 to 15 percent. There are usually some surprises with a DIY project, which, by definition, aren’t known until the project is underway.
- Whether buying paint, lumber or wiring, calculate how much you will need for your project and buy a little extra. That may save you a return trip to the store in the middle of your project. You can return extra materials later or use them for another project.

The 2013 Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction Study is based on responses from more than 4,100 customers who purchased a home improvement product or service within the previous 12 months from a retail store that sells home improvement products. Customers evaluated their primary home improvement retailer. The study was fielded in January and February 2013.

About Rocky’s Ace Hardware

Rocky's Ace Hardware, headquartered in Springfield, MA operates 33 stores in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Florida. The neighborhood paint, hardware, garden center and pet store chain has been in continuous operation, under the same family ownership, since the first store opened in Springfield, MA in 1926. For more information please visit www.rockys.com.

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