

J.D. Power Reports Overall Customer RAC Satisfaction Increases for 2nd Year

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WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif. — 15 November 2011 — Customer satisfaction with rental cars has increased for a second consecutive year, returning to nearly 2006 levels, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2011 North America Rental Car Satisfaction StudySM released Nov. 15.

Now in its 16th year, the study measures overall customer satisfaction with renting cars at airports by examining six factors (listed in order of importance): costs and fees, pick-up process, return process, rental car, shuttle bus/van and reservation process.

Overall satisfaction in 2011 averages 758 on a 1,000-point scale, up from 750 in 2010, driven by increases in satisfaction across all six factors compared to 2010.

“Rental car companies continue to build upon the improvements made in 2010 and are bouncing back from the lower satisfaction levels reported in 2008 and 2009,” said Stuart Greif, vice president of the travel practice at J.D. Power and Associates. “As positive as this increase in satisfaction is, there remains ample opportunity for rental car companies to further delight their customers in the future, particularly in leveraging technology.”

According to Greif, there are opportunities for rental car companies to enhance the rental car experience, save customers time, better inform and set customer expectations and create efficiencies for rental car company operations. These include integrating customers’ mobile devices within rental cars for hands free communication, music or navigation; digitally measuring gas tank levels for more accurate charges; communicating mileage and gas information digitally from the vehicle as customers return cars; and providing real-time estimates of shuttle van or bus arrival times to customers.

The study finds that the average wait time to pick up a rental car is 17 minutes, which improves from 20.5 minutes in 2010. However, in one key area, the pick-up process, satisfaction drops considerably among customers who have to wait more than five minutes to receive their vehicle (an overall satisfaction score of 825 among customers who wait one to five minutes vs. 809 among customers who wait six to 10 minutes).

“The culture of immediacy creates expectations around timeliness of service that can be challenging to meet,” said Jessica McGregor, manager of the travel practice at J.D. Power and Associates. “While the improvement in wait time is certainly positive for the industry, rental car companies must continue to balance the need to serve their customers more quickly with the need to provide improved levels of service by their employees.”

ACE Rent A Car ranks highest in customer satisfaction among rental car companies for the first time with a score of 793, performing particularly well in the shuttle bus/van and costs and fees factors. This is also the first time the Indiana-based independent rental car company appears in the study rankings.

Enterprise follows in the rankings with 787, performing particularly well in the leisure/personal customer segment. National ranks third with 768.

The following tips may be helpful to consumers when renting a car:

- If a kiosk is available, use it instead of waiting in line at the counter. While very few customers currently use kiosks, those who do tend to be more satisfied with the experience overall.

- Understand the different options offered — such as insurance and fuel — before reserving or picking up a vehicle.
- Reserve a navigation system in advance if necessary and leverage smartphones if you are traveling with someone who can help you navigate.
- Bring a Bluetooth or other wireless hands-free device so you can use your phone safely while driving.
- If a problem with the rental car experience occurs, be sure to report it to the company. Many customers never report their problems, so the company doesn't have the opportunity to resolve them.

The 2011 North America Rental Car Satisfaction Study is based on more than 12,500 evaluations from business and leisure travelers who rented a vehicle at an airport location within the previous 30 days to being surveyed. The study was fielded between January 2011 and September 2011.