



Press Release

J.D. Power and Associates Reports: Home Improvement Retailers Continue to Differentiate Themselves Through Their Staff and Service

Ace Hardware Ranks Highest in Customer Satisfaction among Home Improvement Retailers For a Sixth Consecutive Year

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif.: 25 April 2012 — Having a helpful and knowledgeable sales staff and making the shopping process easy are key drivers of customer satisfaction, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2012 U.S. Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction StudySM released today.

The study, now in its sixth year, measures [customer satisfaction with home improvement retail stores](#) based on performance in five factors: staff and service (including availability, courtesy, knowledge); store facility (including ease of finding merchandise and cleanliness); merchandise (including availability and product information); price; and sales and promotions.

For a sixth consecutive year, Ace Hardware ranks highest in satisfying home improvement retail store customers. Ace Hardware achieves a score of 781 on a 1,000-point scale and performs particularly well in the two most influential factors: staff and service and store facility. Lowe's ranks second in the study for the second consecutive year with a score of 769, and performs particularly well in the merchandise factor.

Overall customer satisfaction has declined slightly among all but one of the retailers included in the study. However, high-ranking retailers continue to differentiate themselves through their knowledgeable and courteous staff and shopper-friendly processes (e.g., checkout and returns).

"While many retailers have struggled to right-size their staff with the down economy, Ace Hardware and Lowe's clearly have kept the focus on their customers," said Christina Cooley, senior manager of the home improvement industries practice at J.D. Power and Associates. "To create delighted customers, home improvement retailers must assist customers quickly, help them find the items that they need, and do this with a customer-friendly attitude."

The study finds that high customer satisfaction leads to store loyalty. Approximately two-thirds (64%) of customers rating their retailer "outstanding" are likely to return to the store or the same chain of hardware stores the next time they shop for home improvement products, compared with just one-fifth of customers not rating their retailer "outstanding" who are likely to do the same.

According to Cooley, the study also finds that high-ranking retailers not only have a lower merchandise return rate, but also receive higher satisfaction ratings for their return process. Approximately one-half (45%) of customers indicate that they returned merchandise in the past 12 months.

"If retailers' staff are providing the helpful, informative assistance that customers require, there's a less likely chance the customer will have to return the merchandise, which not only keeps the customer satisfied, but also helps to mitigate the inconvenience," said Cooley.

J.D. Power and Associates' social media research also reinforces the study findings, as the main conversations taking place online about home improvement retailers relate to:

- Consumer preference for knowledgeable and professional customer service
- Seeking interaction with sales staff who have professional or real-life experience (rather than seasonal employees)
- Retailer loyalty and willingness to travel farther for the right advice/service, materials and price

Not unexpectedly, online conversations peak during the summer and at the beginning of the year.

For consumers, J.D. Power and Associates offers the following shopping tips:

- Convenience shouldn't been judged only in the context of location. You may find that it is actually more convenient to drive a few more miles to have helpful and knowledgeable staff ready to assist you, which, ultimately, will help limit your trips to the retailer, thus saving you time and money.
- Discuss your project and what you need with the staff and ask for advice and recommendations. If the staff isn't willing to take the time or doesn't seem engaged, go to another retailer where the staff is eager to help you.

The 2012 U.S. Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction Study is based on responses from more than 6,100 customers who purchased a home improvement product or service within the previous 12 months from a retail store that sells home improvement products. Customers were asked to evaluate their primary home improvement retailer. The study was fielded in January and February 2012.

About J.D. Power and Associates

Headquartered in Westlake Village, Calif., J.D. Power and Associates is a global marketing information services company providing performance improvement, social media and customer satisfaction insights and solutions. The company's quality and satisfaction measurements are based on responses from millions of consumers annually. For more information on [car reviews and ratings](#), [car insurance](#), [health insurance](#), [cell phone ratings](#), and more, please visit JDPower.com. J.D. Power and Associates is a business unit of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

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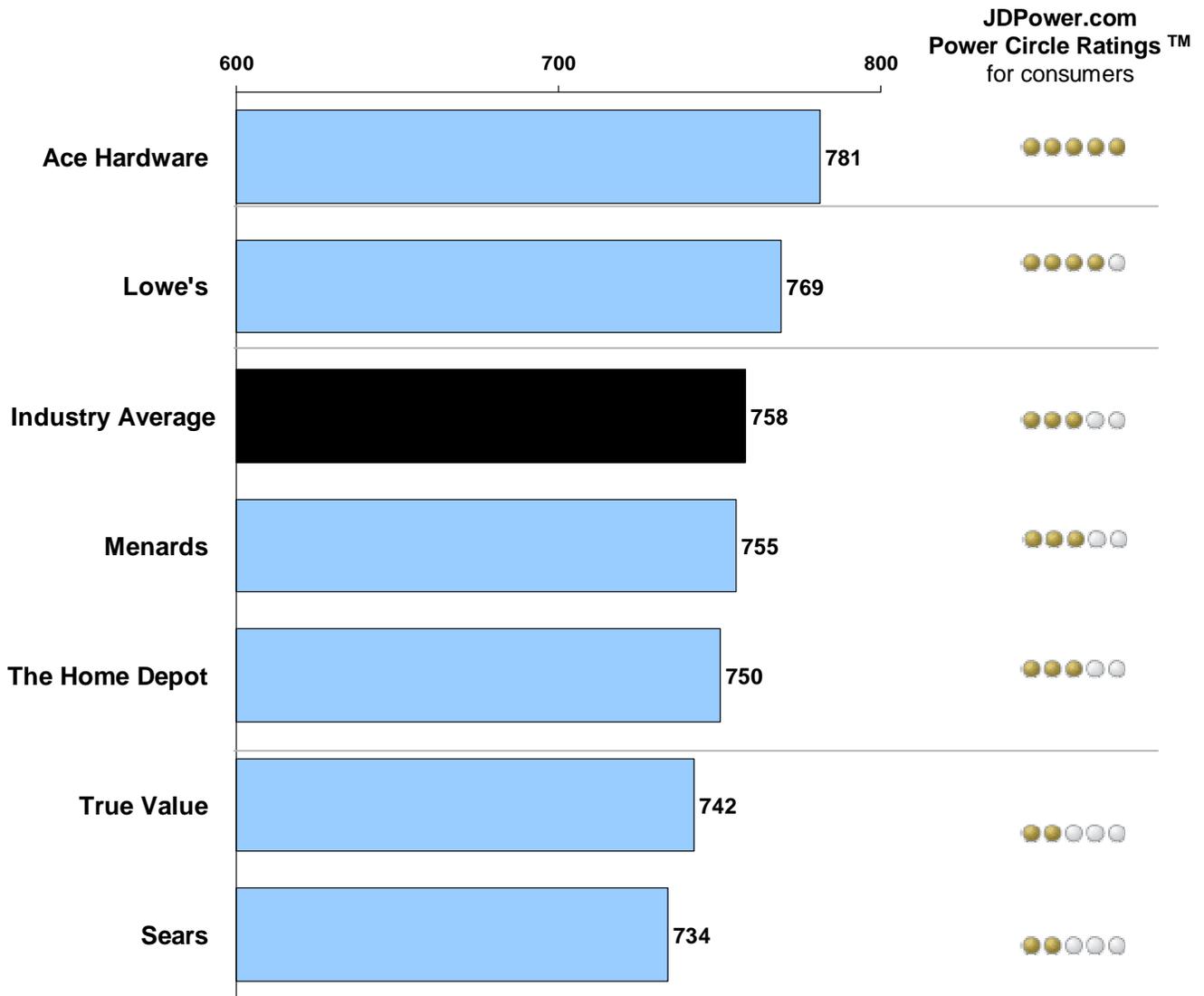
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NOTE: One chart follows.

J.D. Power and Associates 2012 U.S. Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction StudySM

Customer Satisfaction Index Ranking (Based on a 1,000-point scale)



Power Circle Ratings Legend

- Among the best
- Better than most
- About average
- The rest

Source: J.D. Power and Associates
2012 U.S. Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction StudySM

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