

# BRAND AND DEALER RELATIONSHIP TRENDS

*NEW RESEARCH ON WHAT DEALERS WANT  
FROM THE BRANDS THEY WORK WITH.*



Research Conducted in Partnership with Ascend2

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Heroes—particularly in manufacturing—are not always easy to find.

Take Webster’s definition and replace the word “person” with “company.”

he·ro noun \?hir-(?)?\

: a person who is admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities

Now try to come up with a list of manufacturers who are “admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities.”

The fine qualities piece is a little easier. I do believe there are lots of companies with high standards, great integrity, and hard-working team members. But Superman and his cohorts are known much more for their acts of bravery than their “fine qualities.”

Think about why you’re loyal to a certain brand. If you’re like me, you’re loyal because:

...they’ve made it easy to do business with them

...they’ve made it fun to do business with them

...they’ve made you more confident

...they’ve made you feel important

...they’ve saved you money

...they’ve saved you time

...they’ve saved your life

Any of these are earmarks of a company that has taken risks, made important decisions about who they want to be, and made plenty of sacrifices along the way... just like a hero would.

Take our client base for example. We work with OEMs and their suppliers who typically sell their products through independent dealer networks. While those dealers and distributors sometimes say they’re really just looking for the best price, the truth is they’re looking for a hero.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (cont.)

How do we know? Because of the questions they ask our clients...

How soon can you get it here?

Can I get better terms?

Will you help me advertise it?

Will you tell me how much product I should carry?

Are there any spifs for my salespeople?

Are there any spifs for me?

Please tell our customers what's different about your products.

Can you train our salespeople?

Will you help me take care of my customers after the sale?

Will you keep those other guys from selling in my territory?

Will you drive customers to my dealership?

These are all questions that, to address properly, often require taking risks. It requires investments of capital, time, and resources. It requires brave decisions and gutsy action without knowing for sure how it will pan out in the end. In short, it requires a hero.

If you're ready for YOUR cape, the following pages might help you get to hero-status just a little quicker. We've asked hundreds of dealers what they need from their OEMs, and here you'll see their answers. We hope it's helpful!

Best Regards,  
Jim Hubener  
CEO at Huebner Marketing



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **A booming industry:** Nearly half of individuals surveyed who represent dealers of big-ticket outdoor items report that their business grew 10% or more in 2020. And another 41% say they plan to increase the number of brands they carry in the coming year.
- **A brand's story matters:** Three-quarters of retailers consider brand reputation to be very or extremely important to the purchase decision of the end customer.
- **Customer service is critical:** Nearly one-third of retailers report that customer service support, both for the end customer and for the retailers themselves, is critical to a successful dealer-brand relationship.
- **The importance of marketing tools:** 72% of dealers say sales enablement and marketing tools from the manufacturer are very or extremely important.

## PARTICIPANTS & METHODOLOGY

N = 279 Big-Ticket Outdoor Items Retailers

### Dealership's Number of Locations

1 - 2	48%
3 - 5	15%
6 -10	8%
11 - 20	4%
20+	25%

### Dealership's Years in Business

Under 3 years	31%
3 - 10 years	36%
10 - 20 years	16%
20 - 50 years	10%
50+ years	7%

### Participant's primary role in company

Owner/principal	12%
General/Sales Manager	20%
Parts/Service Manager	10%
Sales Representative	19%
Customer Service	31%
Other	8%

### Relevant Products Carried

RVs	29%
Boats	32%
ATVs	37%
Snowmobiles	18%
Golf carts	26%
Motorcycles	28%
Jet skis	20%
Zero-turn mowers	38%

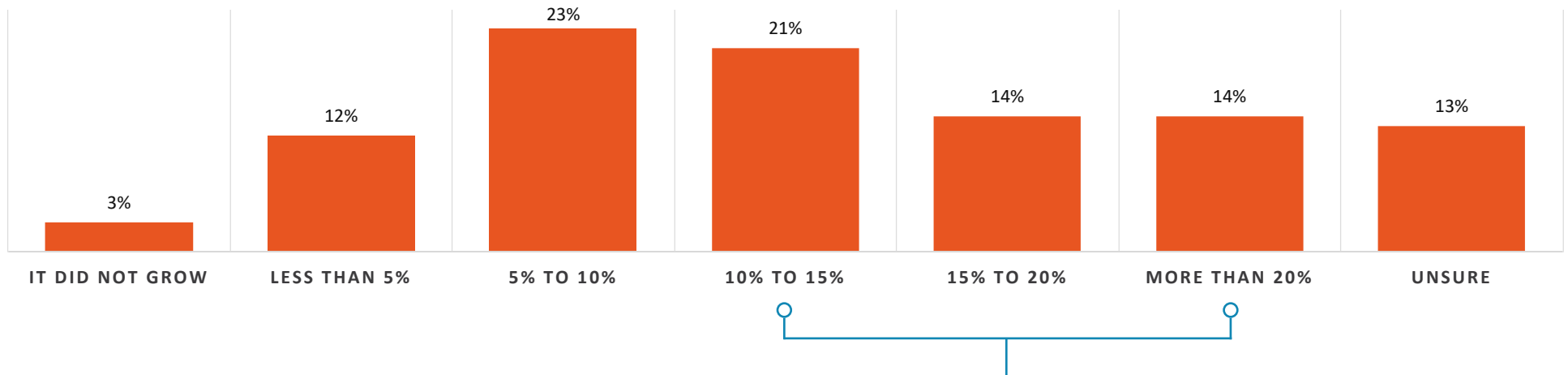
## METHODOLOGY

Ascend2 benchmarks the performance of business strategies, and the tactics and technology that drives them. With a custom online questionnaire, this survey was fielded to a panel of 279 retailers of big-ticket outdoor items during the months of February 2021 to September 2021.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

An undeniable opportunity for big-ticket outdoor brands.

BY APPROXIMATELY HOW MUCH DID YOUR BUSINESS GROW IN 2020?



Nearly half of individuals surveyed who represent dealers of big-ticket outdoor items report that their business grew 10% or more in 2020. And another 41% say they plan to increase the number of brands they carry in the coming year. Now, more than ever, there is a tremendous opportunity for brand manufacturers to capitalize on the growing demand for these types of items.

### So how can brands maximize the benefits of a booming big-ticket outdoor purchase industry?

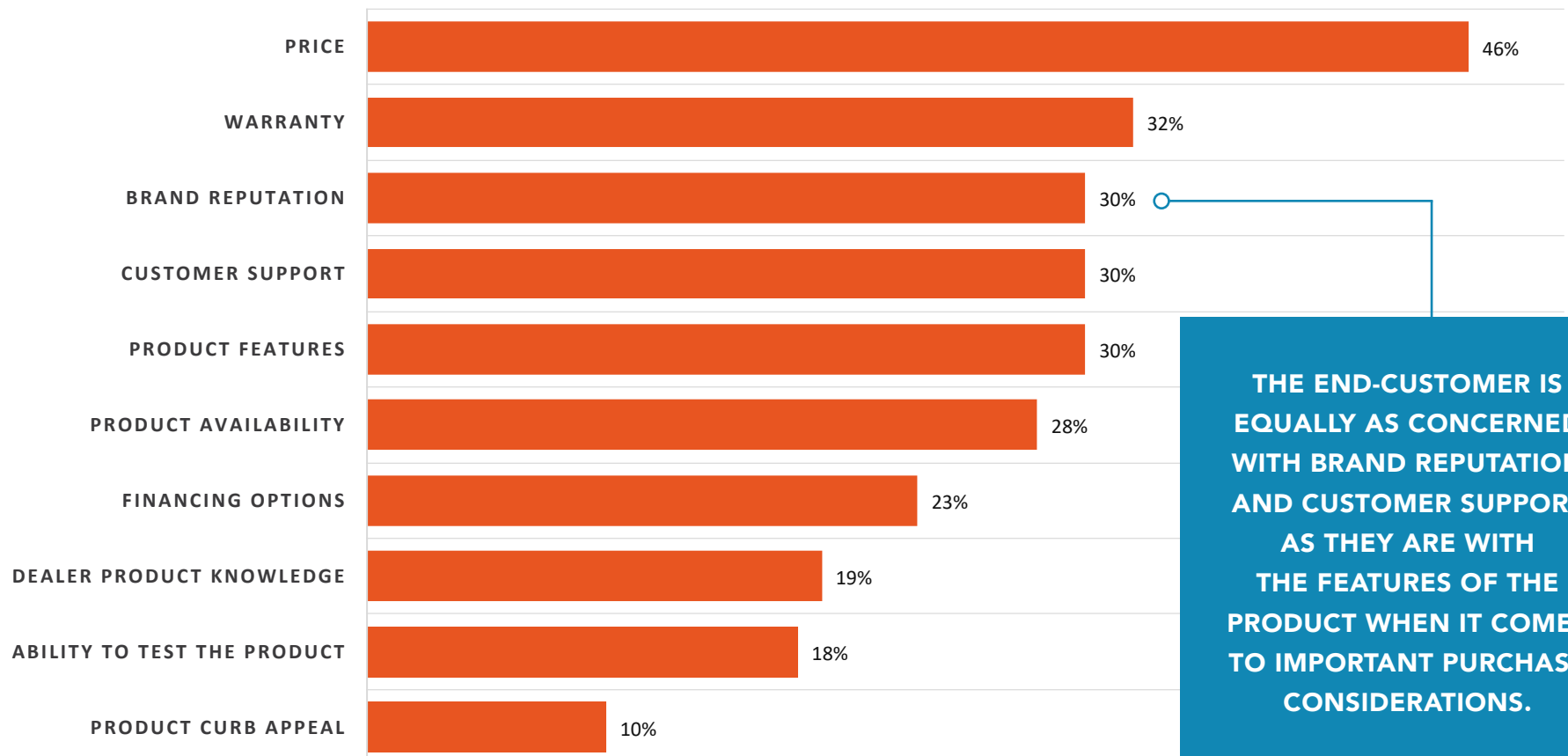
To help answer this question, Huebner Marketing partnered with Ascend2 to field this *Brand and Dealer Relationship Trends* survey from February 2021 to September 2021. The report that follows represents the opinions of 279 professionals in the retail space who sell big-ticket outdoor items such as jet skis, boats, golf carts, ATVs, RVs, snowmobiles, cargo trailers, zero-turn mowers, and more.

## 2.0 THE END-CUSTOMER

### What motivates the final purchase?

Retailers are the frontlines sales channels that connect brands to the end-customer. They offer unique insight into what actually motivates a purchase. By understanding what the end-customer is actually looking for, brands can better provide dealers the tools needed to make the sale. While price is at the top of the list of factors that contribute most to a purchase decision, according to nearly one-third (30%) of retailers, the reputation of a brand is also a major deciding factor and is as important as the customer support they receive and the features of the product they are purchasing.

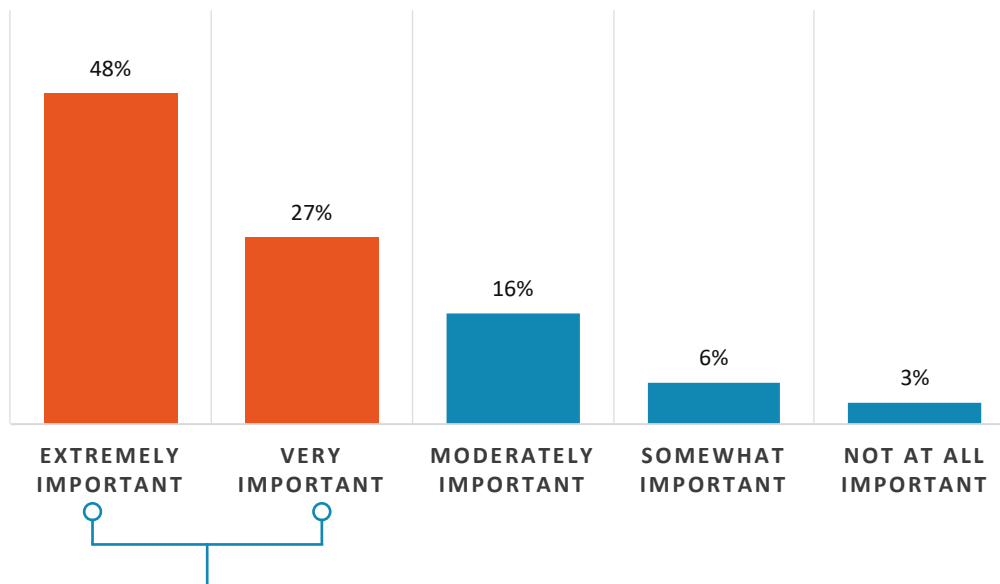
**MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS TO A TYPICAL CUSTOMER AS THEY CONSIDER A PURCHASE (ALL RESPONDENTS)**



## 2.1 THE END-CUSTOMER

### The importance of a brand's story.

HOW IMPORTANT IS A BRAND'S REPUTATION OR STORY TO THE PURCHASE DECISION OF THE END CUSTOMER?  
(ALL RESPONDENTS)



The brand story matters. Three-quarters of retailers agree that brand story is very or extremely important to the end customer when making a big-ticket outdoor purchase. A brand story should create a narrative, something that positions them as unique, exciting, and creates an emotional connection with the customer. A brand story should evoke emotions with your target audience to establish a relationship. The story should bring out your brand's personality and stir the customer to want to be a part of your tribe.

### THE POWER OF A GREAT BRAND STORY

**The story behind Yeti.** Yeti was originally owned by two brothers who loved the outdoors. However, they grew weary of lugging their supplies around in coolers that weren't as tough as their adventures. So, they set out on an initial mission to build rugged coolers. We're talking big-guy-stand-on-top-of-it-all-day-long, grizzly-proof rugged. When the company later turned its attention to travel mugs, the over-the-top quality was a priority. They engineered a mug that claims it would "keep your drink as cold as science allows." The label says the 18/8 stainless steel, the sweat-free design is "over-engineered for maximum ice retention." And it's not just good marketing-speak. The products perform, and they have testimonials on their website to support it.

### So what is the value of Yeti's great brand story?

**MUG WITH NO STORY = \$15**

**MUG WITH A GREAT STORY = \$39.99**

A simple and strong brand story will differentiate you from the competition and give you a competitive edge.

[Learn more](#) on how to develop your brand story.

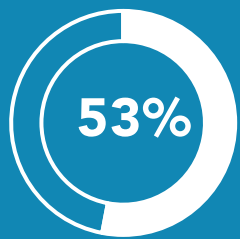


## 3.0 THE DEALER

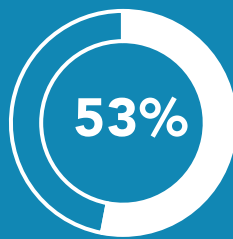
Retailers are focused on increasing in-store and online sales as well as improving the experience of their customers.

A rising tide lifts all boats. By enabling retailers to achieve their own goals, brands can improve their bottom line. So what are retailers of big-ticket outdoor items focused on achieving in the year ahead? 53% of those surveyed report that their focus will be on increasing in-store sales and improving the customer experience while nearly half (49%) say they hope to increase their sales online.

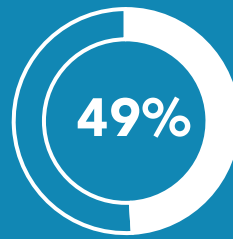
WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE TOP GOALS FOR YOUR DEALERSHIP TO ACHIEVE IN THE YEAR AHEAD?  
(ALL RESPONDENTS)



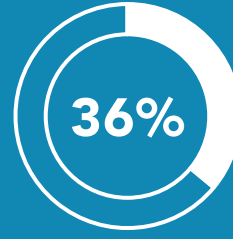
**INCREASE  
IN-STORE  
SALES**



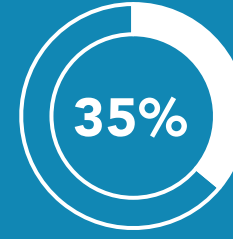
**IMPROVE  
CUSTOMER  
EXPERIENCE**



**INCREASE  
ONLINE  
SALES**



**IMPROVE  
MARKETING  
PERFORMANCE**



**INCREASE  
BRAND  
AWARENESS**



**OPTIMIZE  
ADVERTISING  
SPEND**

### UTILIZE THE BRAND STORY TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Using your brand story to make a personal connection with your customer is an effective strategy to improving the customer experience. Also, the customer experience is both online and in-person, so it is important to have brand consistency at every touchpoint.

## 3.1 THE DEALER

### The challenges dealers are facing.

To best serve the sales channels they work with, it is helpful for manufacturers to understand the challenges that retailers anticipate facing in the year ahead. Market fluctuations are expected to present a major challenge for 38% of retailers in the coming year, while product quality at all levels as well as fuel price fluctuations will impact 28% of those surveyed.

#### TOP 3 CHALLENGES BY PRODUCT TYPE SOLD

##### RV's

Market fluctuations  
Product quality  
Dealer staffing

##### Boats

Market fluctuations  
Changing consumer tastes  
Dealer staffing

##### ATV's

Market fluctuations  
Product quality  
Dealer staffing

##### Snowmobiles

Market fluctuations  
Changing consumer tastes  
Potential interest rate hikes

##### Zero-Turn Mowers

Market fluctuations  
Product quality  
Fuel price fluctuations

##### Jet Skis

Market fluctuations  
Changing consumer tastes  
Potential interest rate hikes

##### Golf Carts

Market fluctuations  
Changing consumer tastes  
Product quality

##### Cargo Trailers

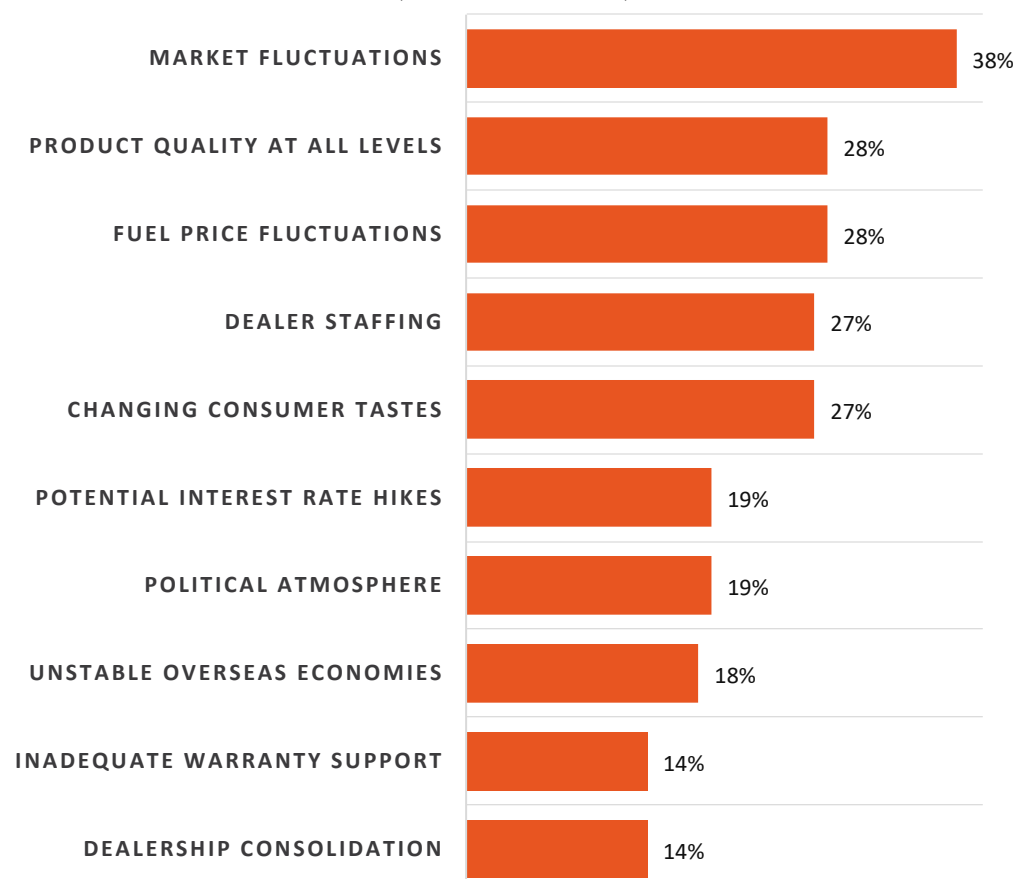
Market fluctuations  
Product quality  
Changing consumer tastes

##### Motorcycles

Market fluctuations  
Product quality  
Changing consumer tastes

#### WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE TOP CHALLENGES POTENTIALLY FACING YOUR DEALERSHIP IN THE YEAR AHEAD?

(ALL RESPONDENTS)

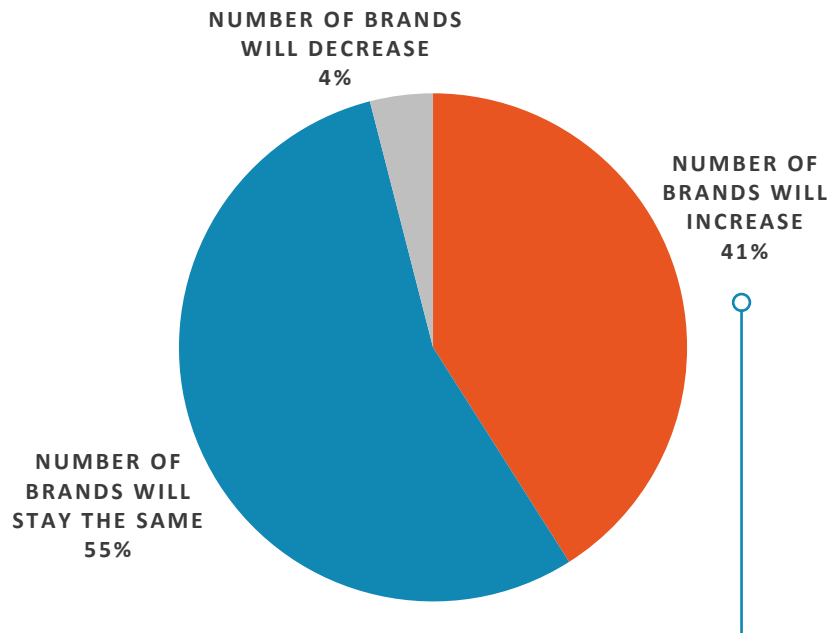


## 3.2 THE DEALER

### Growth mode.

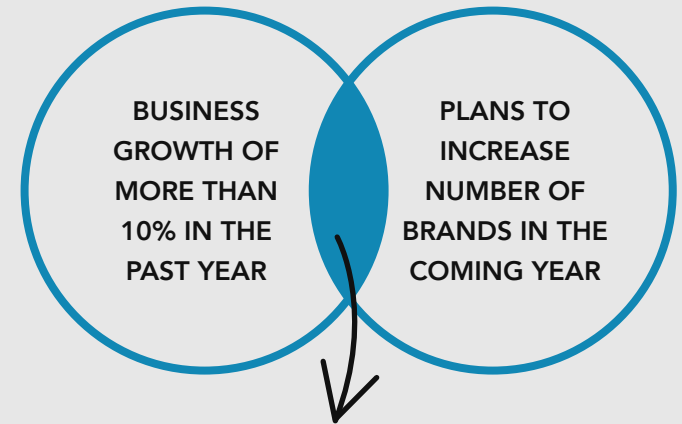
Nearly half (49%) of retailers report business growth of more than 10% last year. Another 41% of those surveyed have plans to increase the number of brands they carry in the coming year.

HOW WILL THE NUMBER OF BRANDS YOU CARRY CHANGE IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?  
(ALL RESPONDENTS)



#### YOUNGER DEALERSHIPS ARE BUILDING THEIR BRAND SELECTIONS

Dealerships that have been in business for less than 20 years are **more likely** than older dealerships to be adding to the number of brands they carry.



#### GROWTH MODE

By comparing those retailers who report the most growth and those who plan to add to the list of brands they carry, a group of retailers who represent dealerships in heavy growth mode emerges. This segment offers particularly interesting insight into what growing businesses want and need from the brands they work with and you will see it referenced in certain sections throughout this report.

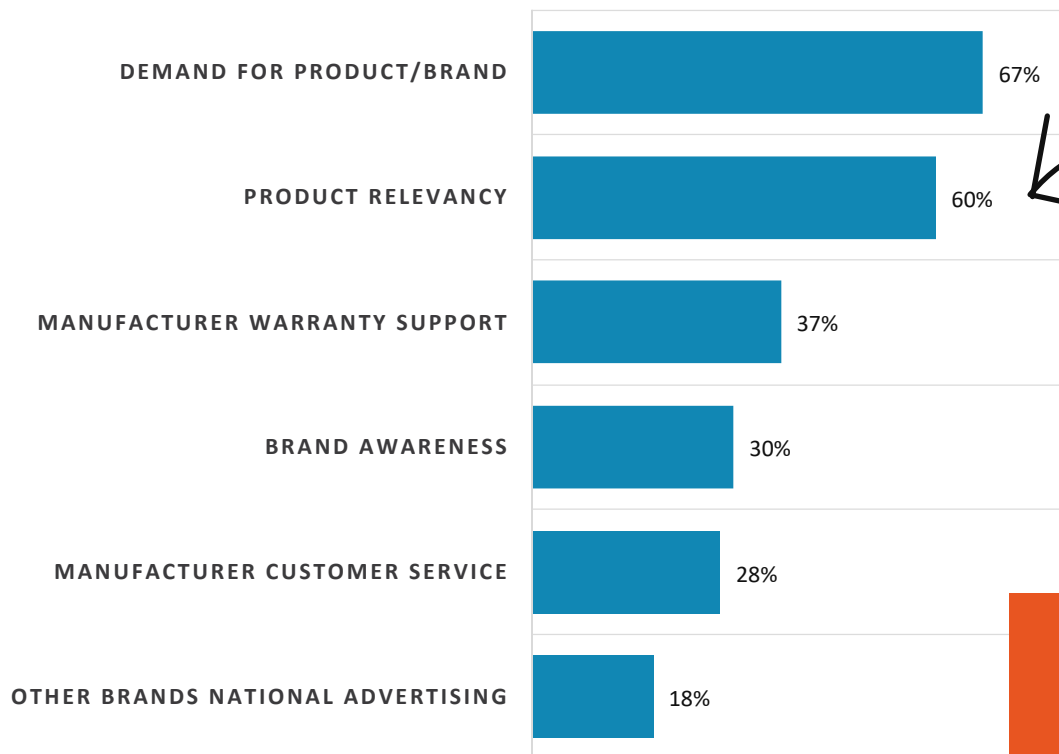


### 3.3 THE DEALER

## Why carry a particular brand?

41% of dealerships plan to increase the number of brands they carry in the next year. But what are the top contributing factors that cause these dealers to carry a particular brand? For dealerships in growth mode, demand for a product or brand and product relevancy are the top two considerations when it comes to carrying a particular brand.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS WOULD CAUSE YOU TO ADD A BRAND OR TAKE AWAY A BRAND YOU CARRY?  
(GROWTH MODE RESPONDENTS)



### GROWTH MODE

A 60% majority of growing dealerships consider **product relevancy** a major deciding factor when considering brands to carry. In a quickly expanding industry, it is easy for brands to get lost in the noise. Finding the most relevant and most valuable brand positioning opportunities available is becoming a key component to working with growing dealers.



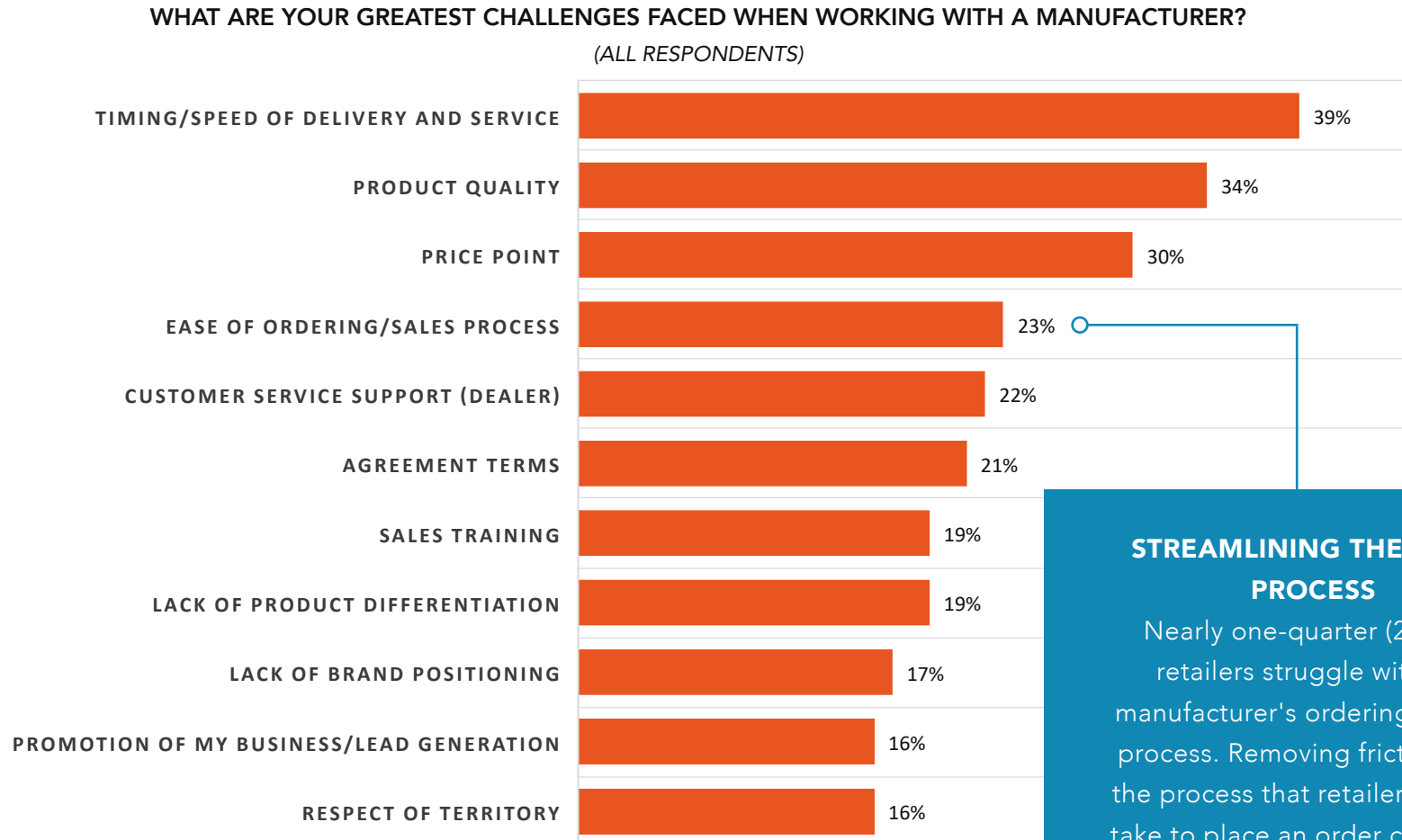
### BECOMING RELEVANT

Take a close look at your company, your team, and your customer perceptions to gain a clear understanding of creating a more relevant brand. This will help you create a path to execute with the right actions, at the right time, in the right order.

## 4.0 THE PROBLEM

### A strained manufacturer - dealer relationship.

What do retailers find to be the most challenging aspect of working with the manufacturers of the brands they carry? 39% report that timing and speed of delivery and service proves to get in the way of a successful working relationship. Product quality also ranks high on this list for over one-third (34%) of retailers surveyed.



#### STREAMLINING THE SALES PROCESS

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of retailers struggle with the manufacturer's ordering or sales process. Removing friction from the process that retailers have to take to place an order can create a better experience for them and lead to more sales.

# 5.0 THE SOLUTION

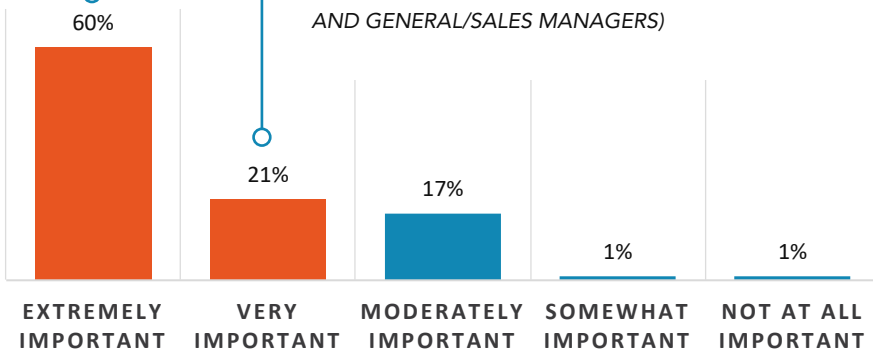
## Improve customer service.

While price point is the most reported important factor that contributes to a successful dealer/brand relationship, close to one-third of retailers report that customer service support, both for the end customer and for the retailers themselves, is also critical to relationship success. Timing and speed of service is also a major factor for 31% of those surveyed.

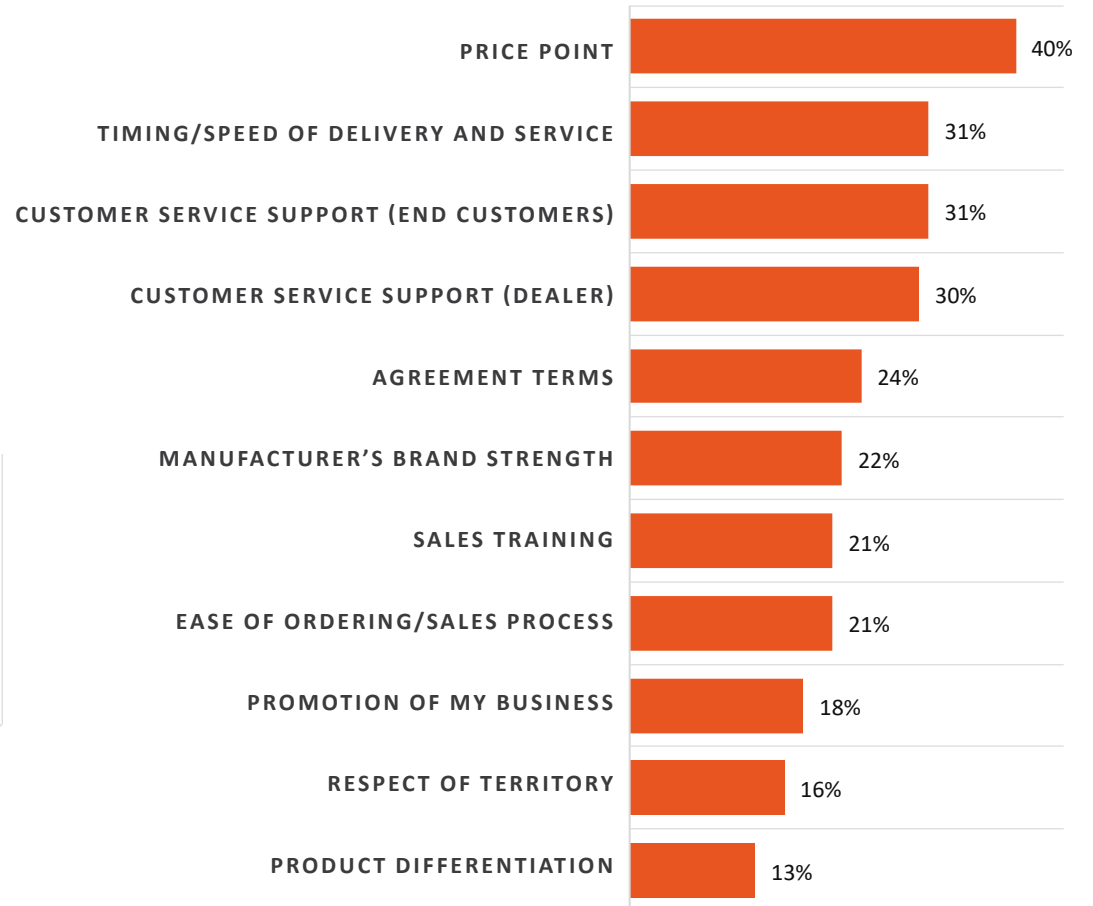
### LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

81% of dealership owners and general or sales managers report that the customer service they receive from the manufacturers they work with is very or extremely important.

**IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE RECEIVED FROM A MANUFACTURER.**  
(SEGMENT: DEALERSHIP OWNER/PRINCIPALS AND GENERAL/SALES MANAGERS)



**WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH A MANUFACTURER?**  
(ALL RESPONDENTS)



## 5.1 THE SOLUTION

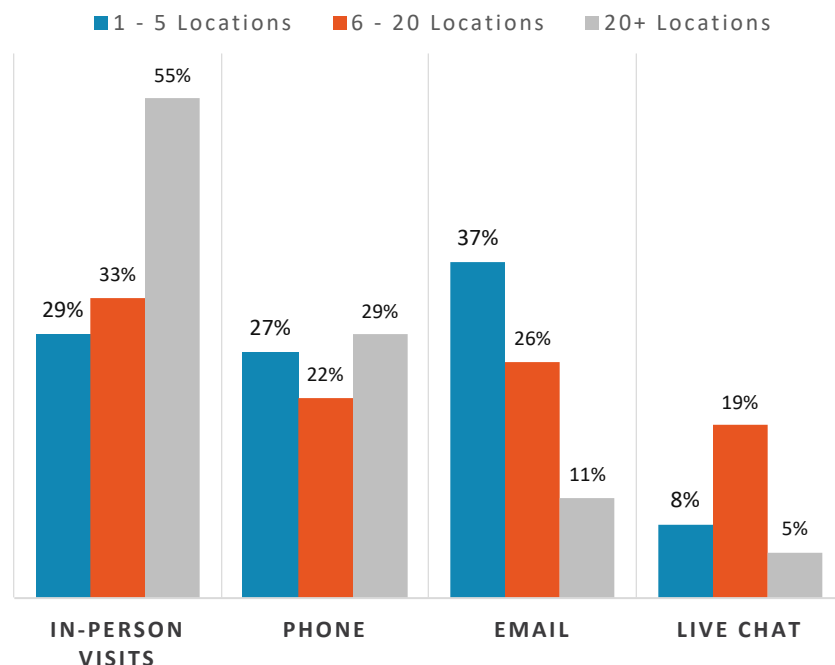
### Communication is key.

The top ways that brands can improve on customer service provided to the dealers they work with are heavily communication-based: **providing a dedicated contact, improved manufacturer updates, and better personal communication with sales management.**

HOW CAN MANUFACTURERS IMPROVE ON THE CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVIDED TO DEALERS?  
(ALL RESPONDENTS)



PREFERRED METHOD OF CONTACT  
(NUMBER OF STORE LOCATIONS)



#### VIRTUALLY OR IN-PERSON?

Interestingly, retailers who represented dealerships with fewer locations prefer to be contacted by email over in-person visits, but those with more store locations prefer in-person visits over channels like email and phone calls.

## 5.2 THE SOLUTION

### Provide the right tools.

Sales enablement tools allow companies to equip their sales team at every stage of the sales process, from lead capture to a closed deal. Sales enablement tools need to be simple to execute and include multi-faceted campaigns with dynamic content and cohesive branding.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL SALES ENABLEMENT/MARKETING TOOLS THAT A MANUFACTURER CAN PROVIDE?

(GROWTH MODE RESPONDENTS)

WARRANTY AND SUPPORT 53%

INCENTIVES 31%

SALES LEADS 31%

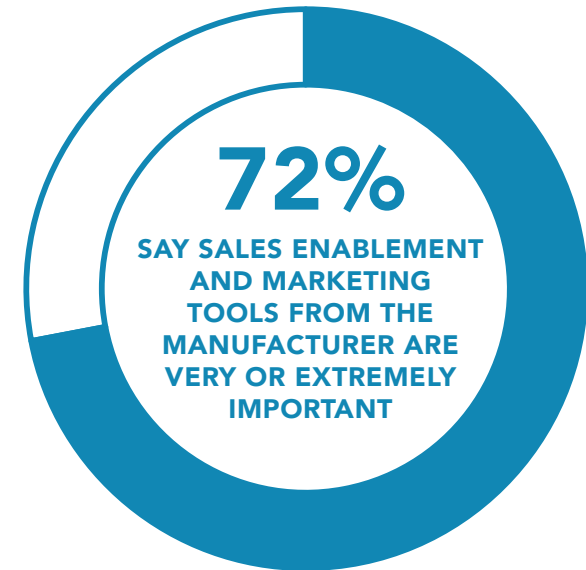
COOPERATIVE ADVERTISING PROGRAMS 29%

SALES LEAD FOLLOW-UP 29%

POST-SALES CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFERINGS (FOR BUYER) 27%

SALES TRAINING 25%

SALES EVENTS 22%



#### GROWTH MODE

Companies in growth mode leverage tools like warranties, incentives, and sales leads by aligning their sales approach with the best-performing programs. They can take the tools given to them by manufacturers and align their approach with the customer journey. Powerful sales enablement programs enable a sales team to tell your brand story and everybody wins (manufacturer, retailer, and the salesperson).





## 5.3 THE SOLUTION

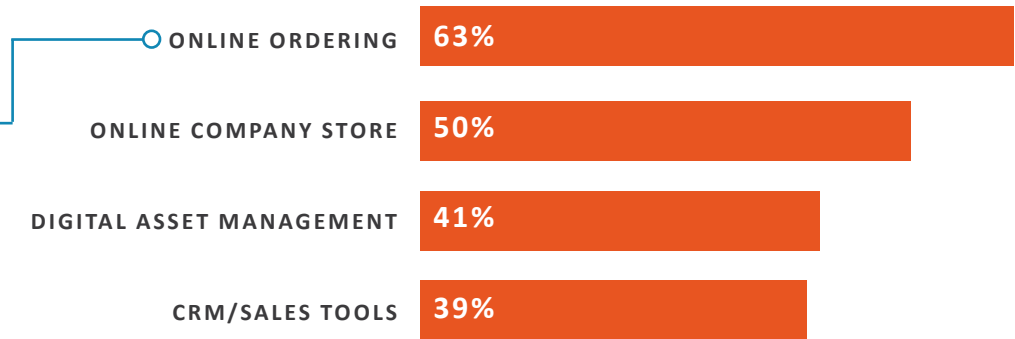
Offer technologies as an incentive.

### ONLINE ORDERING

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of retailers representing dealerships with more than 20 locations are looking for online ordering technology from manufacturers.

WHAT ARE THE MOST VALUABLE TECHNOLOGY OFFERINGS THAT A MANUFACTURER CAN PROVIDE AS AN INCENTIVE?

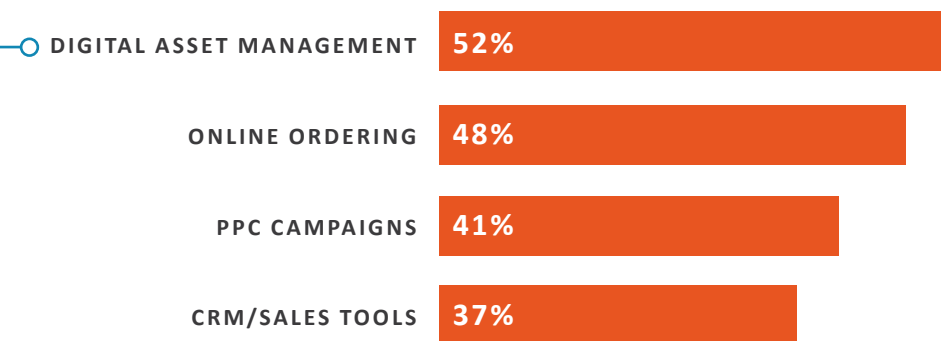
DEALERSHIPS WITH MORE THAN 20 LOCATIONS



### DIGITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT (DAM)

Providing a "marketing hub" to house sales sheets, videos, and other assets ensures easy access to materials that can help dealers sell your products.

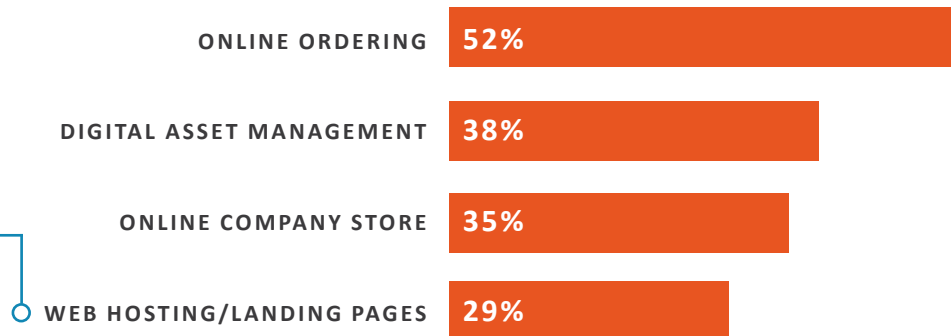
DEALERSHIPS WITH 6-20 LOCATIONS



### WEB HOSTING & LANDING PAGES

Dealerships with fewer locations (1 - 5) place a high value on technologies like web hosting services and microsites provided by the brands they work with.

DEALERSHIPS WITH 1-5 LOCATIONS



## 5.4 THE SOLUTION

### Become the hero.

Ultimately, dealers are looking for a hero in the manufacturers they work with, one who will help them become more efficient in their sales and marketing efforts. Here are a few tried and true ways for brands to be a hero to their sales channels.

- Host an **incentive trip** for volume purchases. It's a nice reward, and a great way to reinforce relationships.
- Offer **co-op advertising programs** to control the messaging. There's no more cost-effective way to build your brand at the local level, and at the same time help your dealers sell your products.
- Help dealers keep up with **technology**. Local online marketing services, web hosting services or microsites, and through-channel marketing automation systems will provide leads and accountability for following-up on those leads.
- For loyal, active dealers, **protect their territories** with a vengeance.
- Host **special events** that focus on them, recognize them, and thank them for their business.
- Create **marketing tools** to help them sell your products. They'll not only be proud to show off materials that make them look good, but it will also enhance your brand as well.
- Give them a **compelling story to tell about your brand** and your products. There's nothing more empowering for a dealer salesperson than a story they can tell their customers that truly differentiates you from everyone else.

#### COOPERATIVE ADVERTISING PROGRAMS

68% of retailers surveyed agree that manufacturer-provided cooperative advertising programs are very or extremely important to their business. But how can they be improved to better serve their needs?

#### MORE FLEXIBLE OR CUSTOMIZABLE USE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

48%

#### BETTER ONLINE ACCESS TO BRAND AND MARKETING MATERIALS

42%

#### HIGHER REIMBURSEMENT PERCENTAGE

36%

#### MORE MANUFACTURER- BRANDED MARKETING MATERIALS

36%

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTNERS



For more than 30 years, manufacturers of big-ticket outdoor products have turned to Huebner as their marketing partner. We have the experience, the creativity, and the gumption to tackle their diverse needs with a singular vision: to make heroes out of manufacturers.

Because to your dealers and distributors, you are a hero. You solve their problems. You make their lives better. You answer the questions keeping them up at night. You have the people, the products, and the services to make it happen. You simply need a partner to tell that story to the world.

From developing a memorable brand position, to getting more visitors to your site, to equipping your frontlines to market and sell your products, Huebner exists to make your story known.

Learn more about [Huebner Marketing](#).



Marketing technology companies and digital marketing agencies partner with Ascend2 to supplement their marketing content, generate leads, and engage prospects to drive demand through the middle of the funnel.

Learn more about [Ascend2](#).

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