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**Despite Inventory Shortage, High Prices, Overall Car Buyer Satisfaction Remains Near Record Levels, According to Cox Automotive Study**

- Overall satisfaction with the dealership experience in 2021 remained near the record-high level set in 2020.
- External factors out of dealers' control – low inventory and high prices – caused overall car buyer satisfaction to retreat from record highs.
- Dealers more focused on digital retailing experienced minimal impact from the chip shortage and increased consumer satisfaction with price paid and the overall buying experience.

**ATLANTA, Jan. 18, 2022** – The 12<sup>th</sup> annual Cox Automotive Car Buyer Journey Study released today reveals that overall car buying satisfaction remains at a near-record level, with the number of highly satisfied buyers higher than before the pandemic.

The latest Car Buyer Journey (CBJ) Study finds that the modest retreat from the record high set in 2020 was due mostly to lack of inventory and high prices. Overall, 66% of consumers were highly satisfied with their shopping experience, down from the record high set in 2020 at 72%, when inventory was more plentiful and favorable incentive programs were offered. Importantly, 75% of vehicle buyers in 2021 noted they were highly satisfied with the dealership experience.

“Despite external market factors that dealers cannot control, the car buying experience remains amazingly good,” said Vanessa Ton, senior manager of research and market intelligence, Cox Automotive. “Dealers have done a great job adapting to what consumers wanted during the pandemic and have permanently evolved the car buying journey in a personalized way that results in very high satisfaction even when consumers are contending with historically low inventory and record-high prices.”

The Cox Automotive Car Buyer Journey Study is based on an online survey of 2,976 U.S. consumers who bought or leased a new or used vehicle between September 2020 and August 2021. This extensive study is designed to measure vehicle buyers' satisfaction with research and shopping as well as the dealership experience including what websites were leveraged when shopping and what digital retailing steps they completed during the transaction.

**Dealer Experience Remained Top Notch**

The 2021 Car Buyer Journey Study found that customers were nearly as content with the overall dealership experience in 2021 as they were in 2020 when satisfaction was at an all-time high. The streamlined process and efficiency facilitated by digital tools, which was established in 2020 and led to record-level satisfaction, remained consistent in 2021. In the study, 78% of new-vehicle buyers and 74% of used-vehicle buyers stated they were highly satisfied with their overall experience with the dealership or retailer that facilitated their purchase.

Compared to 2020, consumers were understandably less satisfied with the price paid and the vehicle selection in 2021. However, they were more satisfied with their engagement with the financing team, which was driven by the surge in satisfaction among those who were “all in” with digital. Those buyers who applied for financing online were significantly more satisfied with the financing process and saved almost a half hour on average at the dealership.

### **The Chip Shortage Hampered the Buying Experience**

Inventory constraints that began in the spring of 2021 negatively affected the buyers' shopping experience this past year. Buyers recognized the consequences of the chip shortage including low inventory and high prices, but they were still motivated to find the right vehicle due to a thriving economy and their desire to have personal transportation for safety and convenience. The uptick in demand and low supply yielded record-high prices which hampered many buyers' trust in the deal and reduced satisfaction with the price that they paid.

### **Higher Digital Engagement Boosted Customer's Confidence in Price and Overall Satisfaction**

In a trend accelerated by the pandemic, consumers generally remain less likely to visit dealerships during the car buying process. The average buyer visits only two dealerships in the process, and relies more heavily on digital tools, according to the most recent CBJ Study. However, with dealership shutdowns in the rearview mirror, slightly fewer buyers were mostly digital, meaning they completed more than 50% of their buying journey steps completely online. The percentage of mostly digital buyers dropped from 20% in 2020 to 18% in 2021.

Compared to buyers who completed fewer steps online, mostly digital buyers were more satisfied with the price they paid and had more trust that the dealership or retailer gave them the best deal. Additionally, completing digital steps created a more satisfying experience overall. Mostly digital buyers were more content with overall purchase experience and the time spent in transacting.

### **Buyers Spent Less Time Researching and Shopping**

Buyers reported spending just under 12.5 hours researching and shopping for a vehicle in 2021, down 46 minutes from 2020, according to the CBJ Study. New-car buyers spent just over 11 hours, only five fewer minutes than in 2020, while used buyers reported spending nearly 13 hours. However, used-vehicle buyers reduced the time spent researching and shopping by nearly an hour in 2021. The largest decline in time spent was in "researching and shopping online," which saw a 23-minute reduction in 2021. Tight inventory and limited product availability likely encouraged shoppers to move more quickly through the process, not wanting to lose out on a good deal.

Third-party websites remained the top website destination, according to the CBJ Study, with three out of four buyers relying on third-party sites, including Cox Automotive sites like Kelley Blue Book and Autotrader, to provide valuable advice during the purchase process.

Another noteworthy uptick was in the popularity of New Form Online Retailers (NFOR), used-vehicle-only sales sites that include Carvana and Vroom. As new-vehicle inventory became more expensive and harder to find, buyers turned to the used-vehicle market and searched the sites of these online retailers for used-vehicle inventory. The number of used-vehicle buyers searching NFOR sites during their vehicle-buying process increased by 9% year over year while the number of new-vehicle buyers searching NFOR sites increased by 4%.

Find more details on the [2021 Cox Automotive Car Buyer Journey Study](#) in the Cox Automotive Newsroom.

### **About Cox Automotive**

Cox Automotive Inc. makes buying, selling, owning and using vehicles easier for everyone. The global company's more than 27,000 team members and family of brands, including Autotrader®, Dealer.com®, Dealertrack®, Dickinson Fleet Services, Kelley Blue Book®, Manheim®, NextGear Capital®, VinSolutions®,

vAuto® and Xtime®, are passionate about helping millions of car shoppers, 40,000 auto dealer clients across five continents and many others throughout the automotive industry thrive for generations to come. Cox Automotive is a subsidiary of Cox Enterprises Inc., a privately-owned, Atlanta-based company with annual revenues of nearly \$20 billion. [www.coxautoinc.com](http://www.coxautoinc.com)

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