

## In a Year Filled With Frustrations for Travelers, Customer Satisfaction With Rental Cars Declines

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### Enterprise Ranks Highest in Satisfying Rental Car Customers for a Fourth Consecutive Year

As frustrations mount for travelers in a year fraught with a record number of flight delays, customer satisfaction with rental cars has declined considerably, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2007 Rental Car Satisfaction Study(SM) released today.

Now in its 12th 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, rental car, return process, reservation process and shuttle bus/van. Overall satisfaction drops from 767 points on a 1,000-point scale in 2006 to 750 in 2007.

"The decline in customer satisfaction with rental cars is indicative of a general decline in performance throughout the travel industry in 2007 -- from airports to airlines to hotels," said Jim Gaz, senior director of travel and entertainment at J.D. Power and Associates. "Rental car customers, in particular, are being faced with rising fuel prices and decreased availability of new rental vehicles, as major automotive manufacturers have reduced their rental fleet sales. While the rental car industry faces its own specific challenges, customer satisfaction may also be influenced by the snowball effect from frustrations consumers are facing with the entire travel experience."

Enterprise ranks highest in customer satisfaction among rental car companies for a fourth consecutive year, receiving an overall index score of 777. Enterprise performs particularly well in five of the six factors: costs and fees, pick-up process, rental car, return process and shuttle bus/van. Enterprise is followed in the rankings by Hertz and National, respectively. National performs particularly well in the reservation process factor, specifically with telephone reservations.

"In particular, Enterprise has widened the gap from its competition through strong performance in cost and fees and in the functionality of their Web site, as well as in the courtesy of their personnel," said Gaz. "These strengths could potentially benefit the two rental car companies recently acquired by Enterprise -- Alamo and National -- as Enterprise aligns these operations."

The study finds that the average reported time that rental car customers wait while picking up or returning their rental car typically exceeds the reported wait times incurred during other parts of the travel experience that are measured by the firm. Rental car customers say they wait an average of 22 minutes to pick up their vehicle, and 14 minutes to return the vehicle, while air travelers report waiting an average of 13 minutes to obtain a boarding pass and check baggage, 15 minutes to go through airport security, and 18 minutes to retrieve checked luggage. Hotel customers report waiting 10 minutes, on average, to check in.

"While travelers understand that some waiting is unavoidable, customers still expect wait times to be kept to a minimum, especially for simpler tasks, such as checking into a hotel or for a flight," said Gaz. "Rental car companies can improve upon managing customer perceptions by finding ways to expedite the pickup and return processes. When customers believe that they have to wait longer to return a rental car than to go through a security checkpoint at an airport-the latter being a presumably more complex process-their satisfaction diminishes, and understandably so."

Consolidated rental car facilities at airports is likely affecting the competitive landscape of the industry, eroding the service advantages that some rental car companies have spent millions of dollars and years to implement. While the study finds that price continues to be the key driver of rental car satisfaction, rental car companies are seeking to differentiate their brands by implementing innovative online booking tools, electronic toll collection services, and hourly rental rates.

"The introduction of new technology in the rental car service process, as well as in rental vehicles themselves, may help improve customer satisfaction as these technologies become more familiar to customers and more prevalent in the industry," said Gaz. "Online booking tools that are specifically optimized for handheld devices, GPS navigation systems and electronic toll collection services in rental vehicles are examples of efforts to provide customers with a more convenient, automated and hassle-free experience."

The 2007 Rental Car Satisfaction Study is based on 5,859 evaluations from business and leisure travelers who rented a vehicle at an airport location between September 2006 and September 2007. To view ratings of rental car companies, visit [JDPower.com](http://JDPower.com).

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