Rolling Resistance Research:

Observations on the Tire Purchasing Experience

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What We Asked

We visited tire stores in the East Bay and talked to employees and customers about the tire purchasing experience.

- Why are you buying tires today?
- What sort of information did you need to choose tires?
- (to employees) What do people look for in tires?
- (to employees) What is rolling resistance?
- How much would you pay for a 1% increase in fuel efficiency?
- Would you pay more for a “green,” fuel-saving tire?

Tire Purchase Experience Overview

Why do people purchase tires?

The people we spoke to tended to fit into these two categories:

Distressed Purchase

- "I just want to get my flat fixed and get out of here. "
- "I'll buy whatever is most affordable and will last a long time this time."

Planned Purchase

- "The tires on my car I'm replacing are too expensive, so I am looking into less expensive tires but I still want good performance."
- "My tires are worn out and it affects my car's performance, so I am buying new high performance tires."

What kind of information do they look at prior to and during the purchase?

Various information sources are used to determine what tire is the best fit.

Employees say:

- "90% don't know anything about tires, I'd say about 10% come in with research."
- "People use the internet, even before the internet they used Consumer Reports. People are well-informed."
- "I use a database to tell customers about tires."

Customers say:

- "I call first and ask what I need."
- "I find it helpful to look at what's on display, but usually I talk to a salesperson."

Inside the Transaction

For most transactions, employees provide the majority of information for customers. Some showroom displays were helpful and informative….

Inside the Transaction 2

…Others were too disorganized.

Inside the Transaction 3

All of the customers we surveyed had relied upon an employee to make the purchase.

We asked employees, "What is rolling resistance?"

The responses we got were either that they were unfamiliar with the concept, or they had a slightly different notion of it.

- "Rolling resistance just depends on the size of the tire. The bigger the tire, the lower the mileage. If you're looking at tires that are the same size, there won't be a difference in resistance."
- "If a customer comes in with poorly aligned tires, we will fix that, that will get rid of the rolling resistance."
- "Say you have a tire that's under-inflated. The car will have to push harder. Rolling resistance is a lot about tire inflation."
- "Off the top of my head, I have no idea what that is."

We asked customers, "Would you pay more for an 'eco-tire'?"

Responses varied, though usually they were either strongly for or against.

For

- " Yes. Probably $50."
- "If rolling resistance was an available metric, I could have justified buying a different tire since so many of the [other] specs were similar."

Against

- "I don't pay attention to how much I spend on gas. "
- "A small reduction in fuel costs doesn't mean a damn thing."

Conclusions

Several themes arose from our observations of the tire purchasing experience

- **Distressed purchasing**
  - Customers making a distressed purchase were more likely to rely on an employee
  - They were less interested in tire characteristics; just wanted a quick, in and out purchase
- **Employee knowledge**
  - The employees we spoke to were largely unfamiliar with the concept of rolling resistance or "greening" tires
- **Communicating about Rolling Resistance**
  - Providing data on fuel savings or rolling resistance confused people during the survey
  - Customers said that they would consider purchasing a "green" tire, or a tire that would "save on fuel"