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**CUSTOMERS RATE ACE HARDWARE NO. 1 FOR FIFTH STRAIGHT YEAR  
IN J.D. POWER STUDY**

*Rommel's ACE beats the big box store competition*

**FRUITLAND, MD (October 18, 2011)** – Home improvement store shoppers are more satisfied with store facilities, merchandise and pricing in 2011, compared with 2010, according to the recently-released *J.D. Power and Associates 2011 U.S. Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction Study*.

The study, now in its fifth year, measures customer satisfaction with home improvement retail stores based on performance in five factors (listed in order of importance): 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 fifth consecutive year, Ace Hardware ranks highest in satisfying home improvement retail store customers. Ace Hardware achieved a score of 786 on a 1,000-point scale and performed particularly well in the two most influential factors: staff and service and store facility. Lowe's improved from a fourth ranked position in 2010 to rank second in 2011 with a score of 771, and performed particularly well in the merchandise factor. Menards retained its third ranked position from 2010 with a score of 765 and performed particularly well in the sales/promotions and price factors.

Finishing below the industry average of 754 in the 2011 ratings were Sears (749), TrueValue (742), The Home Depot (737) and Do It Best/Do It Center (708).

Not only has satisfaction with store facilities improved, compared with 2010, but also home improvement store customers indicate that they are more satisfied with store facilities than any other aspect of the retail experience.

"Shoppers, whether novices to home improvement or those who are more experienced, need not be intimidated by the store," said Christina Cooley, senior manager of the real estate and construction industries practice at J.D. Power and Associates. "Retailers have invested in improving their layouts and signage to help guide customers to the products that they are looking for."

Within the store facility factor, ease of finding desired merchandise is of primary importance to

shoppers at home improvement stores.

"When customers aren't able to find the merchandise on their own, it's critical that they receive assistance quickly -- ideally within two minutes," said Cooley. "The highest-performing retailers are typically able to meet this threshold. In contrast, the average customer-reported wait time for assistance is four minutes. Customers should not hesitate to ask for assistance, as the study indicates that they can depend on retailers to help them when asked and that assistance comes relatively quickly."

On average, customers shop at their primary home improvement retailer two to three times per month. Although most customers indicate they visit home improvement stores on weekends, there has been an increase in the percentage of shoppers who make weekday visits. In 2011, 41 percent of customers say they shop during the week, compared with 34 percent in 2010. According to Cooley, the increased incidence of weekday shopping means that retailers need to make sure they adjust their staffing levels accordingly during the week.

There has also been an increase in 2011 in the percentage of shoppers who say they used a self-checkout kiosk (53% in 2011 compared with 42% in 2010).

"While self-checkout is meant to be more convenient for the customer, it is not uncommon that the customer still will require some intervention from store staff, so this is another area in which retailers need to ensure proper staffing," said Cooley. "To ensure a quick checkout, customers should limit using self-checkout to visits in which they are purchasing relatively few items and the bar codes are clearly identifiable on all products."

The study also finds the following key trends:

- The average customer in 2011 has spent \$1,650 at home improvement retailers within the past 12 months.
- In 2011, customers spent a greater percentage of their overall annual expenditure at their primary home improvement store (72%) than in 2010 (68%).
- The 2011 U.S. Home Improvement Retailer Satisfaction Study is based on responses from more than 6,900 consumers who purchased a home improvement product or service within the previous 12 months from a store that sells home improvement products. Consumers were asked to evaluate their primary home improvement retailer. The study was fielded in March and April 2011.

*(Source: J.D. Power and Associates, 05/04/11)*

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*Rommel ACE stores are located in Cambridge, Ocean City, Salisbury, Perry Hall, Severna Park and Stevensville, Md., as well as Selbyville, Seaford and Dover, Del. and Chincoteague and Exmore, Va. All Rommel's Ace stores offer the Ace Rewards card, saving consumers money toward future visits. Information and store locator: <http://rommelsace.com>. [www.facebook.com/RommelsACE](http://www.facebook.com/RommelsACE)*