
Big Drop since Last Year in Reputation of Car Manufacturers, Investment and Brokerage Firms, and Banks

Health insurance, internet providers, and pharmaceuticals also lose ground

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – August 18, 2009 – Every year, The Harris Poll asks a cross-section of adults whether they think about 20 leading industries do a good or a bad job of serving their consumers. The latest poll finds very big changes in the last 12 months. Some industries have seen their reputations crumble. Some show modest slippage. A few show significant improvement.

These are among the results of a nationwide telephone survey conducted by Harris Interactive® of 1,010 U.S. adults between July 8 and 13, 2009. While the question asks how good or bad different industries are at serving their consumers, our experience suggests that *the answers reflect a somewhat broader picture of how the public feels overall about these industries.*

Unsurprisingly, the industries whose reputations have been most badly hurt in the last 12 months are car manufacturers (down 31 points), banks (down 24 points), and investment and brokerage firms (down 27 points).

In light of the current debate about health care reform it is interesting to note that health insurance companies (down 10 points) and pharmaceutical companies (down six points) have also slipped while hospitals have improved by six points. Interestingly, life insurance companies improved (up 12 points) while health insurance lost ground.

Industries that are most likely to be thought of as doing a good job

Supermarkets, hospitals, online search engines, packaged food companies, and computer companies enjoy the best reputation for serving their consumers. The percentage of adults who think they are doing a good job are 92% for supermarkets, 78% for hospitals, 76% for online search engines and 72% for packaged food, computer hardware and software companies.

Industries that are most likely to be thought of as doing a bad job

The most unpopular industries, using this measure, are tobacco, oil, managed care, and health insurance. These are the only industries on the list used in the survey where more than half of all adults believe they are doing a bad job: tobacco companies (63% doing a bad job), oil companies (60%), health insurance (58%) and managed care (54%).

Other industries with relatively high negative ratings include investment and brokerage firms (46%), car manufacturers (45%), pharmaceuticals (45%), banks (38%), and cable companies (37%).

Industries that are doing better this year

Airlines show a bigger improvement this year than any other industry. Tobacco (while still at the bottom of the list), life insurance, and computer hardware companies have also improved.

The score used to measure changes over time, since Harris first asked these questions in 1997, is *the number of adults saying “good job” for each industry minus those saying “bad job.”* Using this measure, airlines are up 16 points, from 18 to 34 (which is still far lower than their score of 66 in 1998), life insurance is up 12 points, from 26 to 38, and tobacco companies are up 11 points, from minus 43 to minus 32.

Industries that are doing worse this year

The biggest declines using the same measure (those saying “good job” minus those saying “bad job”) are for car manufacturers, and investment and brokerage firms. The car manufacturers’ score has dropped 31 points from 37 to 6. Banks are down 24 points from 46 to 22. Investment and brokerage firms are down 27 points from 24 to minus 3.

Other industries that have slipped include health insurance (down 10 points), Internet service providers (down 7 points), and pharmaceuticals (down 6 points).

So What?

Events matter. The collapse of General Motors and Chrysler has battered the reputation of car manufacturers. The economic crisis, the collapse of the housing and stock markets, and the rise of unemployment have had a dramatic impact on the reputation of banks and investment and brokerage firms.

The health insurance and pharmaceutical industries have probably suffered because of the criticisms directed at them in the health care reform debate. Airlines, the biggest winner this year after huge declines in 2007 and 2008, may have benefited from reduced traffic and less crowded airports.

Why tobacco companies should have gained is more difficult to explain. Maybe they just haven’t been in the news much – and for them no news is almost always good news.

TABLE 1
INDUSTRIES DOING GOOD JOB/BAD JOB OF SERVING THEIR CONSUMERS

“Do you think ...generally do a good or bad job of serving their consumers?”

Base: All respondents assigned (variable base)

		Good Job	Bad Job	Not Sure/ Refused	Good Job Minus Bad Job
Supermarkets	%	92	6	2	86
Hospitals	%	78	19	3	59
Online search engines	%	76	13	11	63
Packaged food companies	%	72	24	3	48
Computer hardware companies	%	72	17	11	55
Computer software companies	%	72	15	13	57
Electric and gas utilities	%	69	28	3	41
Internet service providers	%	68	23	8	45
Telephone companies	%	67	32	1	35
Online retailers	%	66	17	17	49
Life insurance companies	%	65	27	9	38
Airlines	%	63	29	9	34
Banks	%	60	38	2	22
Pharmaceutical and drug companies	%	54	45	1	9
Cable companies	%	54	37	8	17
Car manufacturers	%	51	45	4	6
Investment and brokerage firms	%	43	46	11	-3
Health insurance companies	%	39	58	3	-19
Managed care companies, such as HMOs	%	35	54	10	-19
Oil companies	%	34	60	7	-26
Tobacco companies	%	31	63	6	-32

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD JOB/BAD JOB BY INDUSTRY

“Do you think each of the following generally do a good or bad job of serving their consumers?”
Base: All adults

													Changes	
	'97	'98	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	1997-2009	2008-2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Supermarkets	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	74	79	84	83	84	84	86	N/A	+2
Online search engines	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	68	67	77	65	63	N/A	-2
Hospitals	57	50	48	41	56	53	49	59	51	58	53	59	+2	+6
Computer software companies	71*	71	71	72	48	57	62	67	67	61	59	57	-14	-2
Computer hardware companies	71*	70	70	71	49	57	64	74	64	64	64	55	-16	+9
Online retailers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51	56	48	45	49	N/A	+4
Packaged food companies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	58	62	67	59	55	46	48	N/A	+2
Internet service providers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51	62	46	52	45	N/A	-7
Electric and gas utilities	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	50	34	42	43	41	N/A	-2
Life insurance companies	35	39	39	36	34	29	27	44	42	18	26	38	+3	+12
Telephone companies	61	53	32	27	22	20	17	42	38	35	37	35	-26	-2
Airlines	N/A	66	45	15	47	40	61	62	42	26	18	34	-32	+16
Banks	52	46	49	46	54	50	52	57	61	56	46	22	-30	-24
Cable companies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	28	28	-1	14	17	N/A	+3
Pharmaceutical and drug companies	60	50	24	20	30	4	-4	13	25	21	15	9	-51	-6
Car manufacturers	44	44	40	40	41	38	44	34	31	46	37	6	-38	-31
Investment and brokerage firms	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	35	40	45	24	-3	N/A	-27
Health insurance companies	13	1	-15	-19	13	-12	-20	-19	-3	-21	-9	-19	-32	-10
Managed care companies such as HMOs	13	3	-27	-30	-12	-23	-23	-13	-3	-20	-14	-19	-32	-5
Oil companies	24	38	-13	-39	-6	-6	-25	-36	-24	-33	-32	-26	-50	+6
Tobacco companies	-28	-28	-34	-37	-36	-32	-30	-28	-25	-46	-43	-32	-4	+11

Notes: N/A= Not Asked

(1) *In 1997 “computer companies” were rated together (i.e., hardware and software companies were not measured separately).

(2) The trends for airlines are from 1998, as they were not included in the 1997 survey.

Methodology

The Harris Poll was conducted by telephone within the United States between July 8 and 13, 2009 among a nationwide cross section of 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, number of adults, number of voice/telephone lines in the household, region and size of place were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. However, only approximately 500 people were asked about each industry.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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The Harris Poll® #90, August 18, 2009

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