

SHIFT INTO ACTION



Car Buyers Insights

What Kiwi car buyers are thinking, feeling and doing in 2026



INTRODUCTION

MAPPING THE MODERN BUYER JOURNEY

This report maps the full road to a sale for Kiwi car buyers. From initial mindset and brand consideration through to online research, first contact, test drive, purchase, and post-purchase experience.

Brands and dealerships that understand each stage are better placed to show up at the right moment.

Whatever your inventory, there's something in here worth acting on.

ROBUST DATA AND SCALE YOU CAN TRUST

The findings are drawn from a nationwide survey of 1,949 New Zealand car buyers. People who identified as recently purchasing a car or actively in the market to buy. This makes our survey one of the largest automotive consumer surveys conducted specifically in New Zealand.

TAILORED INSIGHTS

A new car buyer and a used car buyer are doing fundamentally different things, especially in New Zealand. This report keeps them separate and to best reflect behaviour across the most common vehicle purchase segments in New Zealand, we've segmented the data across three buyer types.

THREE BUYER TYPES

NEW CAR BUYERS

Experience-driven purchaser

USED CAR BUYERS

Value-focused, well-researched comparison shopper

EX-DEMO BUYERS

Shoppers after new-car quality at a used-car price

BUYER MINDSET

BUYER MINDSET

BUYER RESEARCH

BUYER ENQUIRY

BUYER TEST DRIVE

PURCHASE & FULFILLMENT

POST PURCHASE

76%

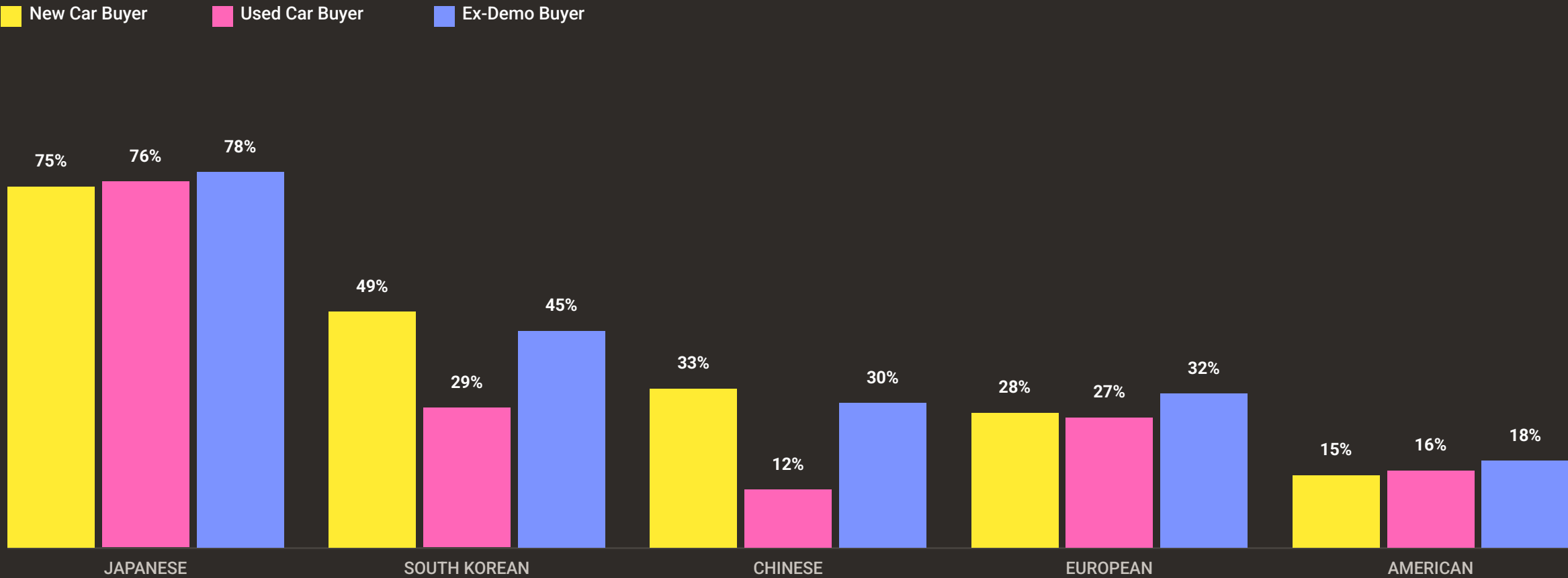
OF ACTIVE BUYERS ARE CONSIDERING A JAPANESE VEHICLE

This highlights the overwhelming dominance and trust consumers place in Japanese manufacturers. The strong reputation of reliable motoring is consistently strong when seeking value across all segments.

Buyers choices are now more diverse than ever, with most buyers now considering multiple brands the chance of buyers considering just yours is very slim.

BUYER MINDSET

BRAND CONSIDERATIONS



Note: Percentages total more than 100% as respondents could select multiple answers

BUYER MINDSET

BRAND CONSIDERATIONS

Why this matters for a dealer and what you can do:

Stock What Buyers Trust

Japanese brands remain the baseline for most buyers, consideration is still massive (especially in Used for dependability), but it is no longer the *only* stop on the buyer journey.

Conquest opportunities across brands are becoming more common. The traditional "Euro-only" or "Japanese-only" buyer is now highly swayable.

Treat quality used stock as the "discovery zone." Weight your inventory to give buyers relevant side-by-side choices (e.g., Japanese hybrid vs. Chinese EV/ICE vs. Euro). Minimise buyers having to compare elsewhere.

Build Confidence

When brand bias disappears, value details win. Proactively highlight the "proof points" that justify the price. Safety ratings / features, superior build quality, premium tech features or verified single-owner history.

Buyers are highly receptive to high-spec vehicles from newer or alternative brands. Translate these "features" into real world benefits relative to the buyer.

Audit your digital listings. If your trade-ins or used stock only list standard factory specs, you may be invisible. Wherever you can, leverage Safety, History, and Condition.

The Chinese Brand Opportunity

33% of New Car buyers are open to the value for money on offer from new Chinese manufacturers.

This consideration is currently low in the used car market (**12%**) but will grow as brands are proven and used supply increases. This presents a compelling used car sourcing opportunity in the future.

61%

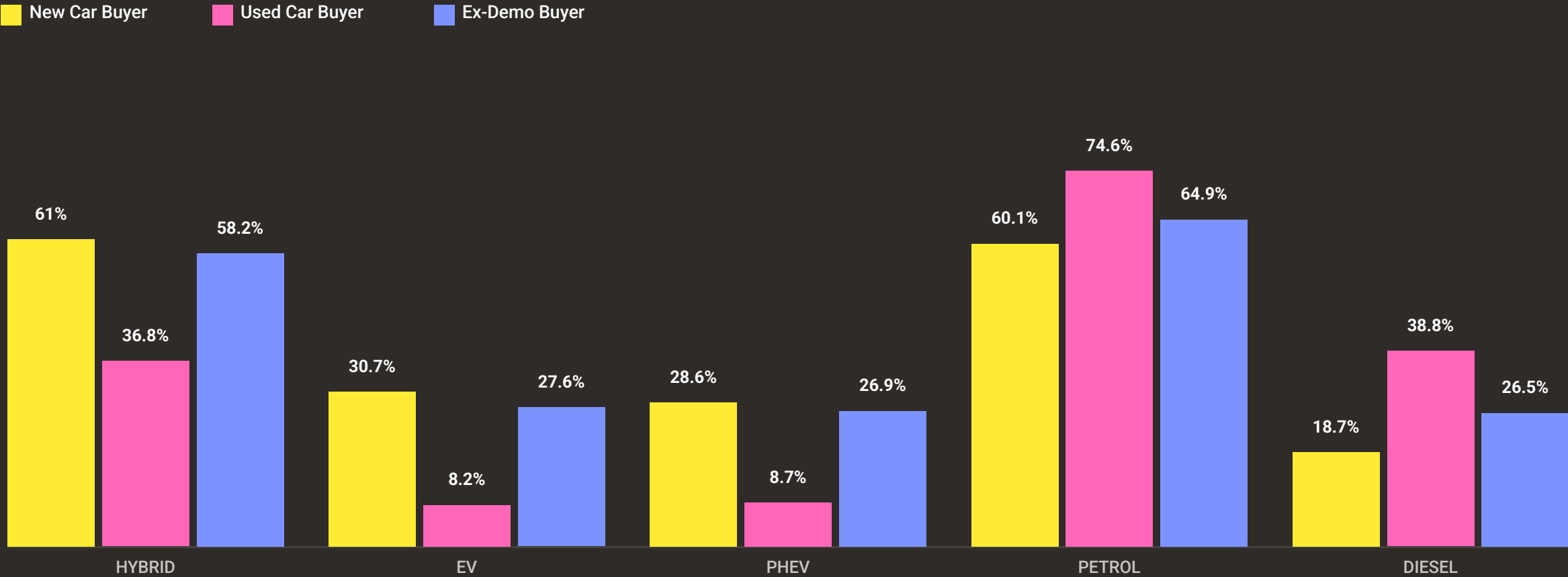
OF NEW CAR BUYERS ARE CONSIDERING A HYBRID, MAKING IT THE SINGLE MOST POPULAR FUEL TYPE FOR NEW VEHICLES

With 78.5% of all buyers ranking fuel economy as critical in 2026, that number makes sense.

While many people are considering Hybrids however, your more traditional fuel types remain high on buyers list.

BUYER MINDSET

ECONOMY IS CRITICAL



Note: Percentages total more than 100% as respondents could select multiple answers

ECONOMY IS CRITICAL

Embrace Hybrids

Buyers see hybrids as the practical middle ground between fuel savings and EV range anxiety. Stock accordingly and make sure your team can speak confidently to lifetime cost of ownership.

Address The Used EV Trust Gap

Consideration drops from **30.7%** for new EVs to just **8.2%** for used. That's not a lack of EV interest, it's a lack of confidence in used ones.

A battery health report with every used EV sale goes a long way toward closing that gap.

It's Not All About Electric

Hybrids are the headline, but petrol still leads the used market (**75%**) and diesel holds a solid niche (**38.8%**), likely towing and commercial.

Your mix needs to reflect the whole market, not just the trend.

74%

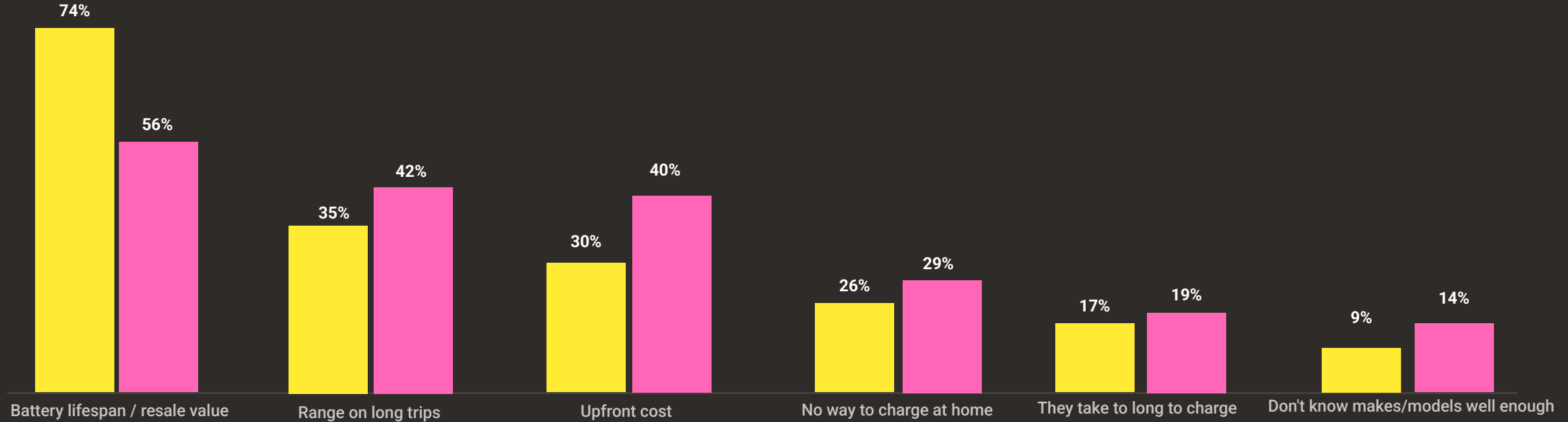
**OF NEW CAR BUYERS CITE
BATTERY LIFESPAN AND RESALE
VALUE AS THE REASON THEY
RULE OUT AN EV**

Not range. Not charging. Not purchase price. The barrier to EV adoption is perceived long-term financial risk.

EV ADOPTION CONCERNS

■ New Car Buyer

■ Used Car Buyer



New only / Used only — figures as reported in the underlying survey commentary

EV ADOPTION CONCERNS

Sell Confidence, Not Just Cars

The fear is financial. Counter it directly: lead with battery warranty terms as a performance guarantee rather than a repair policy, use real resale data or guaranteed future value to replace anxiety with facts.

Tailor Your Pitch For Used Buyers

Range on long trips (42%) and upfront cost (40%) matter more than resale for this group.

Offer extended test drives, help them understand and map out the most efficient charging plan, and use a cost-of-ownership calculator to show how quickly the savings close the gap.

Fill The Knowledge Gap

14% of used buyers and 9% of new buyers simply don't know EV makes and models well enough.

Host EV education events, build comparison guides, and train your team to lead with information.

BUYER RESEARCH

BUYER MINDSET

BUYER RESEARCH

BUYER ENQUIRY

BUYER TEST DRIVE

PURCHASE & FULFILLMENT

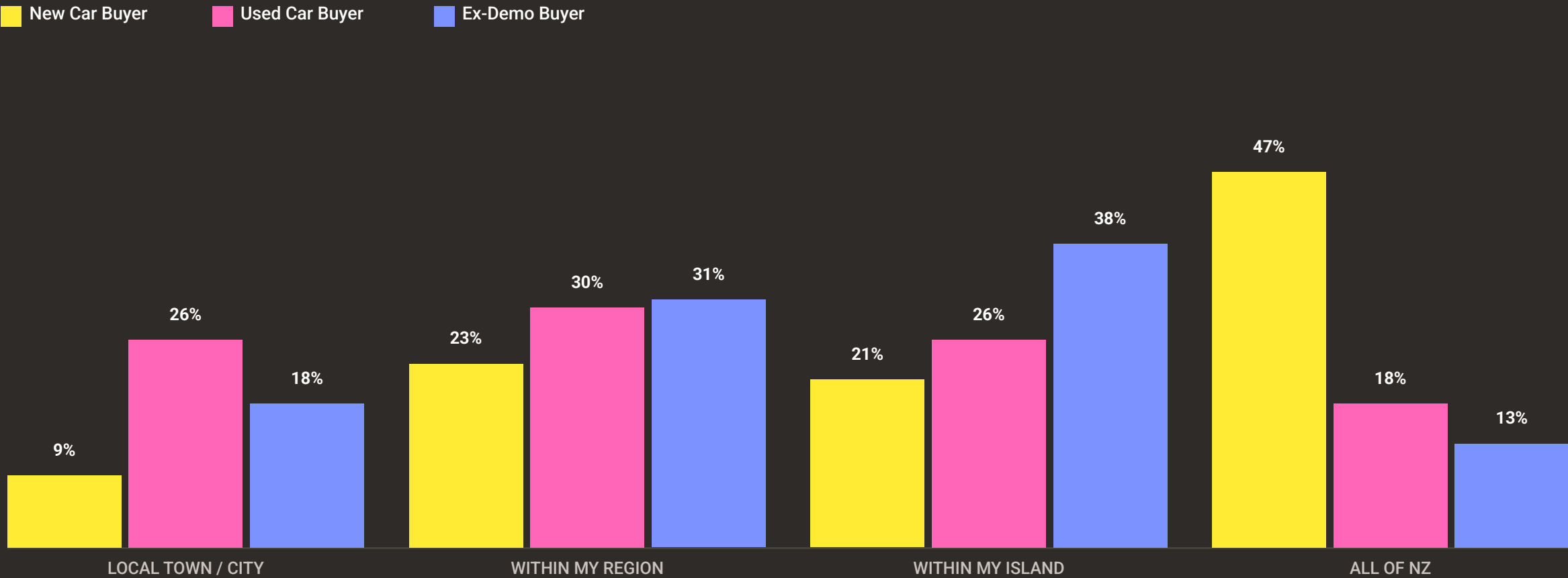
POST PURCHASE

77%

OF BUYERS ARE ACTIVELY LOOKING OUTSIDE THEIR LOCAL AREA

Your online showroom is the first introduction to the buyer, and they are more open to purchasing nationwide if this is a frictionless journey for them.

HOW FAR DO BUYERS SEARCH?



HOW FAR DO BUYERS SEARCH?

Your Showroom Is Nationwide

For new cars, **47% of buyers** search across all of New Zealand.

Your digital presence is competing with every same-brand dealer in the country.

Master Your Digital First Impression

A remote buyer can't inspect the car in person, so your listing needs to do the job.

Clear photos (including imperfections), a detailed description, and a personalised video walkthrough can make all the difference.

Make Logistics A Selling Point

"How easily can I get it home?" should be an opportunity, not a barrier.

A clear, affordable nationwide delivery option needs to be front and centre in your marketing.

"We deliver nationwide" is too vague. Be clear how easy and affordable you can make this for the buyer.

Tailored Messaging By Vehicle Type

New car buyers will hunt nationally for the right deal.

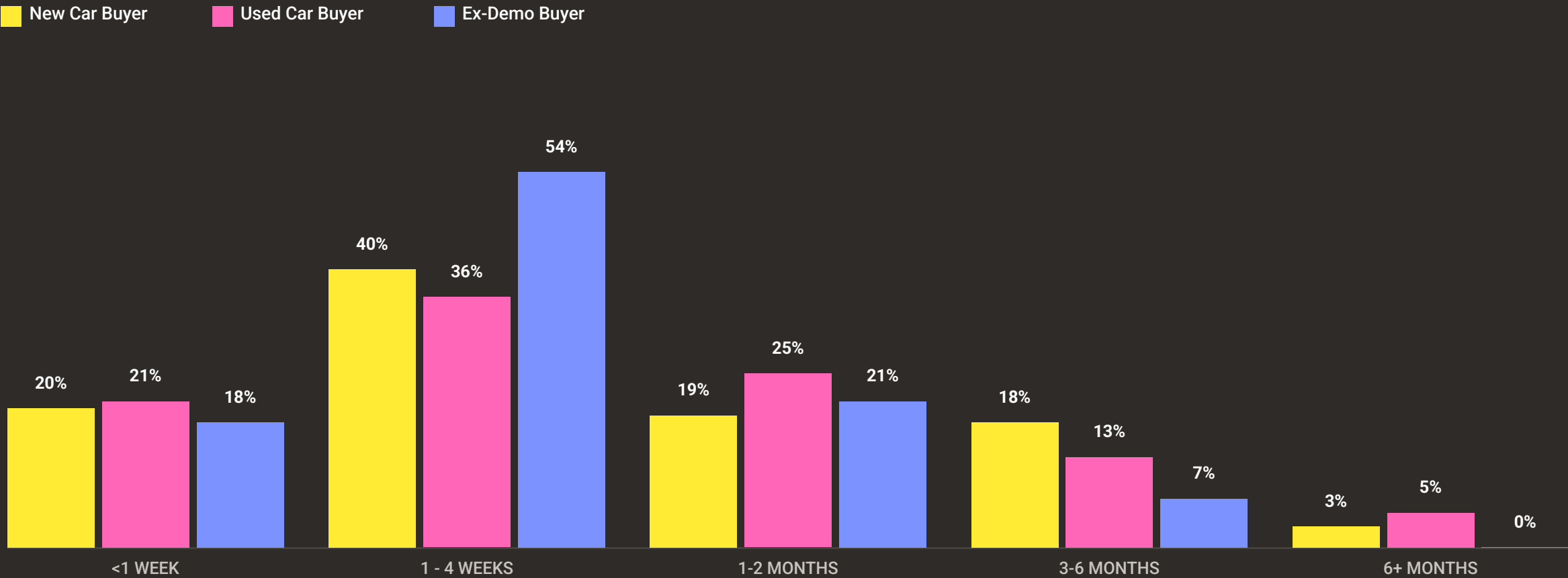
Used and ex-demo buyers tend to stay regional but will travel for the right spec, colour, or condition. Market accordingly.

21%

OF BUYERS CONTACT A DEALER AFTER LESS THAN A WEEK OF RESEARCH

Buyers are more informed than ever before, but you have no way of knowing the length of time they have been searching. Treat every inbound lead as well-informed and ready to buy.

BUYER RESEARCH – BEFORE DEALER CONTACT



BUYER RESEARCH

Why this matters for a dealer and what they can do:

Treat Every Enquiry As Informed

An oddly specific question usually means a buyer has spent weeks researching. Answer it thoroughly.

Dismissing an unusual enquiry could mean dismissing a buyer who is nearly ready to purchase.

Match Their Knowledge

Buyers are arriving well-researched. If your team can't keep up, trust breaks immediately. Invest in deep, ongoing product training.

Validate the customer's research, don't just recite a features list.

Master The Pivot

If a specific car the buyer researched is no longer available, a knowledgeable salesperson can save the sale by understanding what features the buyer was actually after and finding the right alternative on the yard.

BUYER ENQUIRY

BUYER MINDSET

BUYER RESEARCH

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BUYER TEST DRIVE

PURCHASE & FULFILLMENT

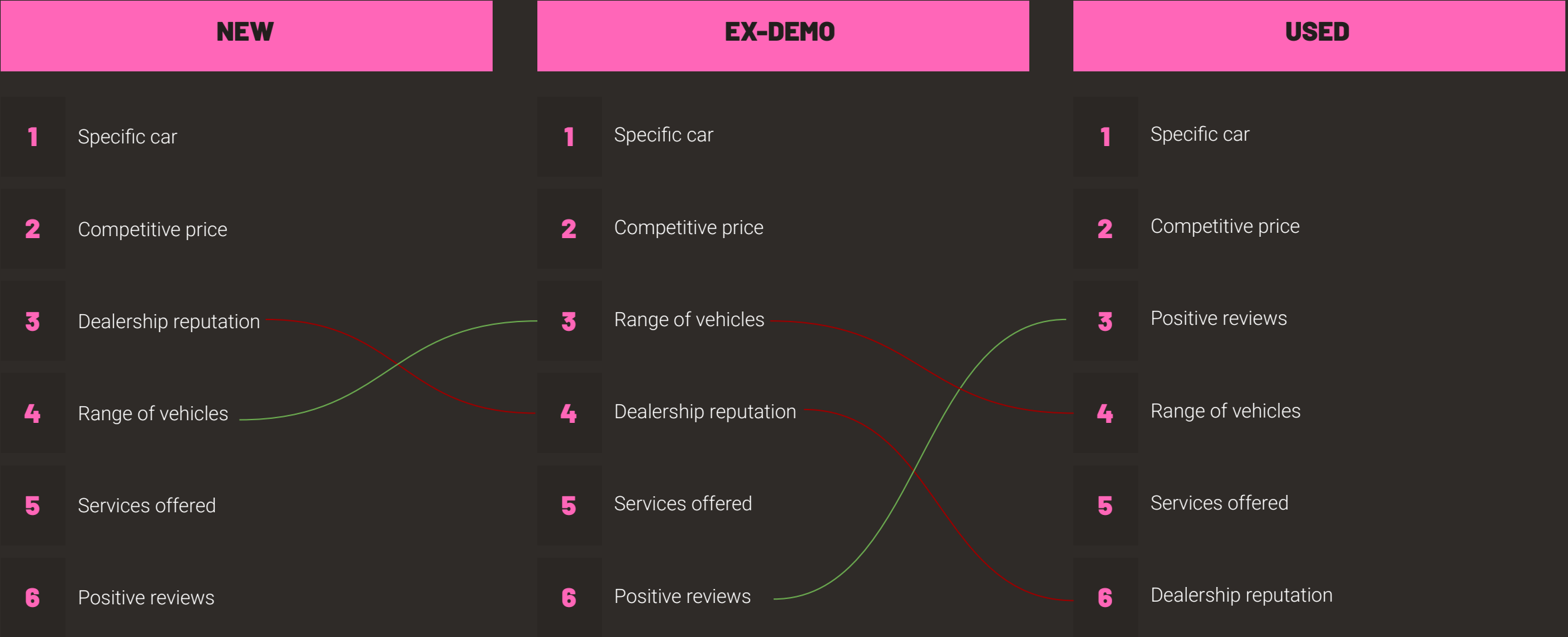
POST PURCHASE

72%

**OF BUYERS CONTACTED A DEALER
BECAUSE THEY HAD THE CAR
THEY WANTED**

Right product, right time. That's the top consideration. From there a dealership's reputation and how it shows up in the local community matters for New Car buyers, but this is less critical to Ex-Demo and Used Buyers. Conversely, strong online peer-to-peer reviews of a dealership becomes critical for used car buyers.

WHAT DRIVES DEALERSHIP CONTACT



WHAT DRIVES DEALERSHIP CONTACT

The Car Is The Hero

Stocking the right vehicles is the foundation. Everything else is secondary to having what buyers are actually searching for.

Reputation Sells New cars, Peer-to-Peer Reviews Sell Used

For new cars, buyers have greater confidence and trust in the product. The new car brand reputation and warranty is doing some of the lifting, but the dealer's reputation in the community matters.

For used cars, positive reviews are the most important consideration for buyers, next to you having the right car at the right price.

New or Used, reputation management is not optional.

Range Matters For Ex-Demo Buyers

This group is comparing trim levels, colours, and kilometres to find the best value.

A diverse selection of Ex-Demo options is a key drawcard for these buyers.

Lead With The Car, Close With Services

Finance, insurance, and service plans rank consistently low as reasons for first contact.

They matter at the close, not in your advertising.

35%

OF ALL BUYERS PREFER IN PERSON OR WALK IN AS THEIR METHOD OF COMMUNICATION

These buyers will not pick up the phone or send an email, they have done their research, they know the car they want. They are not there to kick tyres.

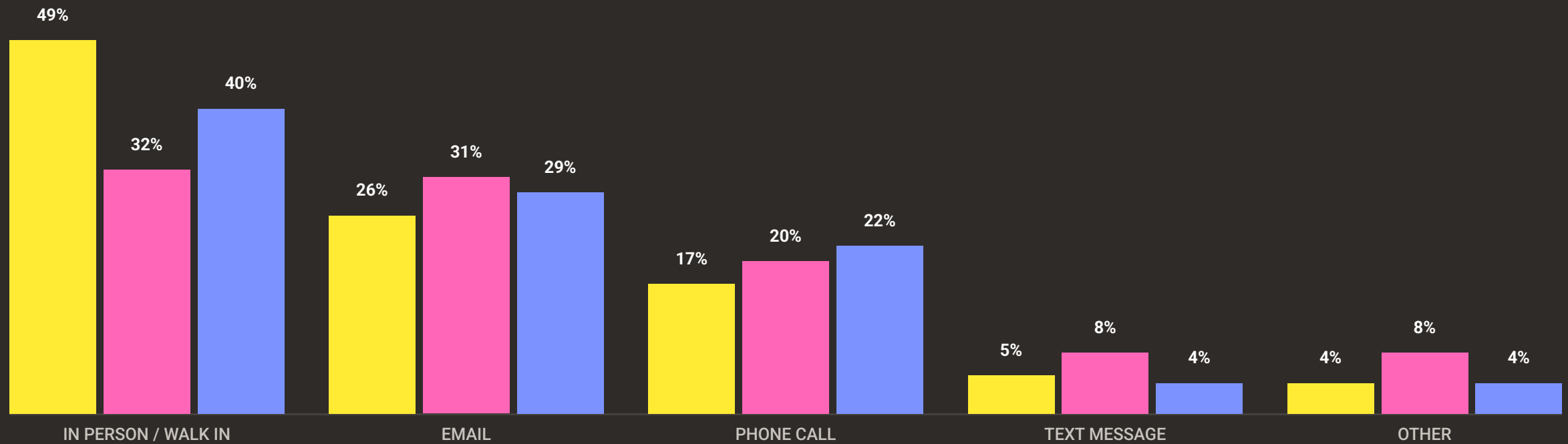
BUYER ENQUIRY

BUYER CONTACT – WHAT'S THEIR PREFERENCE

New Car Buyer

Used Car Buyer

Ex-Demo Buyer



BUYER ENQUIRY

BUYER CONTACT

Mirror The Medium

If a buyer emails, email them back, if they text, text back. A phone call before the buyer is open to one may create friction and signals you're running your process, not theirs.

Your team needs to write a compelling email just as well as they handle a phone call.

Earn The Right To Call

Once you've answered their initial questions in the medium they prefer, you've earned the follow-up call or visit.

Know Your Buyer Type

Used car buyers are more comfortable calling first (**41.6%**); they want quick answers about the condition of a specific vehicle.

New and ex-demo buyers are more likely to walk in (**42.5% and 48.4%**) after seeing and researching the make / model online. They want to validate their research.

Your team's knowledge of every vehicle on the yard is key to moving these conversations forward confidently.

Rules Of Engagement

"Call every internet lead within five minutes" is outdated.

Buyers do expect to be contacted within 1-2 hours of their enquiry.

Mirror the medium rules apply.

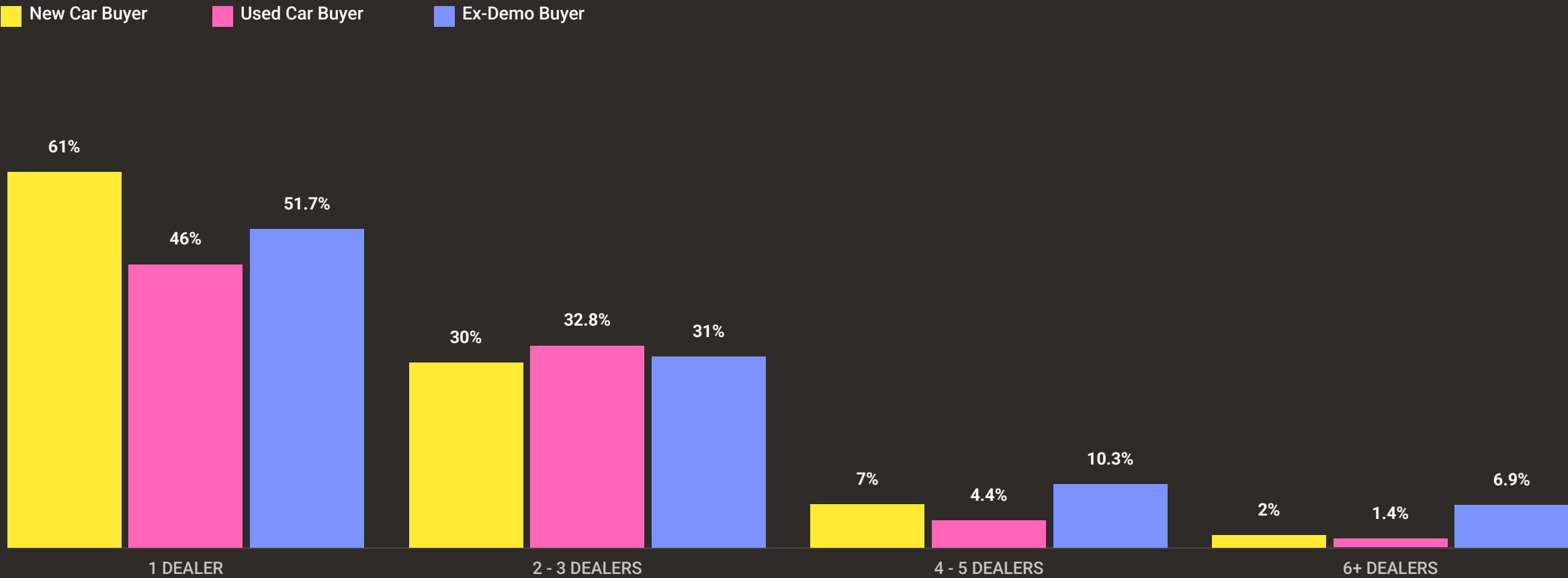
48%

OF BUYERS CONTACTED JUST ONE DEALERSHIP

For nearly half your inbound leads it's an audition and you have one shot, the sales are yours to lose.

BUYER ENQUIRY

DEALERS CONTACTED BEFORE PURCHASE



DEALERS CONTACTED BEFORE PURCHASE

Treat Every Lead Like A Final Exam

Speed of response, professionalism, and a fair trade-in appraisal are what you'll be assessed on.

Focus on consistent, timely processes around follow up and use market data to demonstrate trade-in appraisals with transparency.

New Car Buyers Want one And Done

61% of New Car Buyers contact only one dealer. The dealership experience is the differentiator for these buyers.

Get it right and there's no reason for them to shop around.

Used Car Buyers Are Comparison Shopping

54% of used Car Buyers contact **more than one** dealer. Assume you're being shopped.

Competitive pricing, honest listings, and strong reviews are how you win that comparison.

Remove Every Point Of Friction

As the market fragments and offers buyers more choice, they want the most frictionless journey.

Quick trade-in valuations, straight forward finance, easy delivery, a clean end-to-end process.

For the buyers who only want to deal with one place, making it easy is the whole pitch.

BUYER TEST DRIVE

BUYER MINDSET

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BUYER TEST DRIVE

PURCHASE & FULFILLMENT

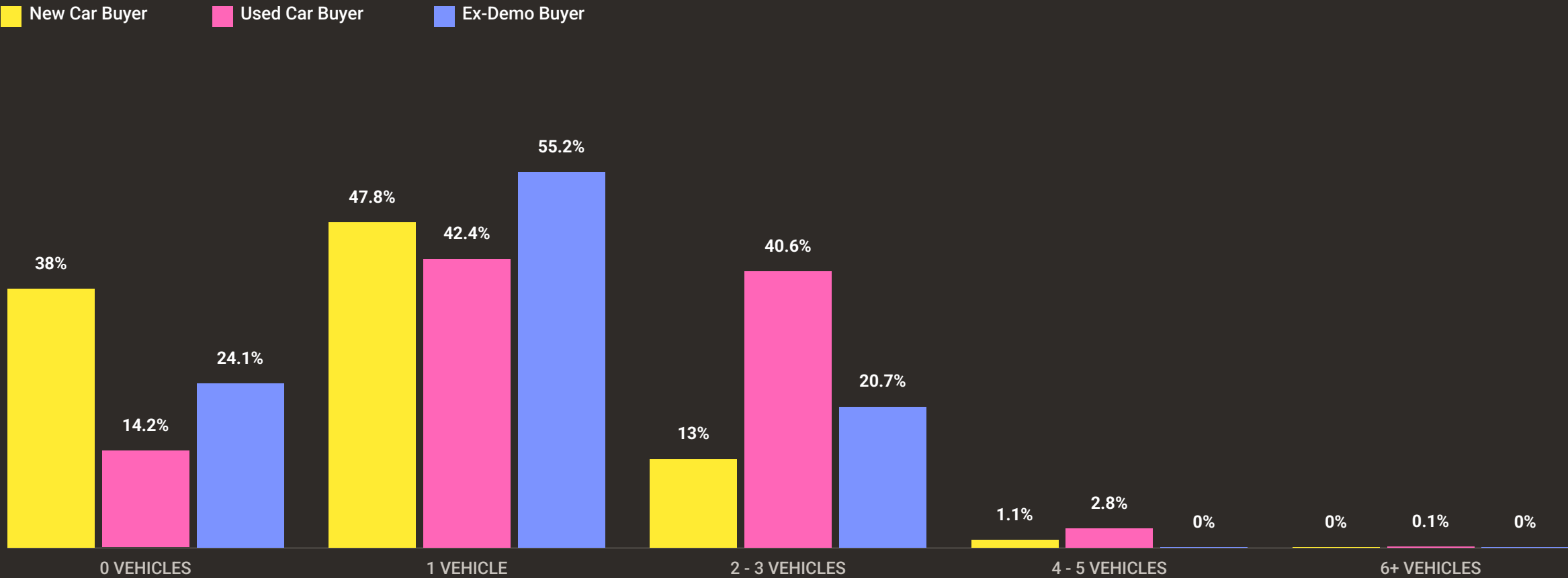
POST PURCHASE

42%

OF USED CAR BUYERS TEST DROVE JUST ONE VEHICLE

This reveals that the test drive is often not a comparison tool, but the final confirmation step in a buyer's journey. They have done their research, found the car online, and are driving it to validate their choice.

HOW MANY VEHICLES TEST DRIVEN BEFORE PURCHASE



HOW MANY VEHICLES TEST DRIVEN BEFORE PURCHASE

The First Drive Is Your Best Closing Opportunity

47.8% of new, 55.2% of ex-demo, and 42.4% of used buyers only test drive one car.

Treat it as the final step, not the start of an evaluation. The car should be clean, fuelled, and ready.

38% Of New Car Buyers Didn't Test Drive At All

They're buying on brand reputation, reviews, and your digital presence.

Your listings, photos, video and in-person walkarounds, need to be good enough to close a sale without the customer ever visiting.

Used Car Buyers Are Still Shopping

"How do I get it home?" should be an opportunity, not a barrier.

Clear, affordable nationwide delivery options need to be front and centre in your marketing.

"We deliver nationwide" is too vague.

Tailor By Vehicle Type

Choose roads that show the car at its best: smooth stretches for comfort, a hill for power, a tight corner for handling.

The test drive should confirm everything the buyer already wants to believe about the car.

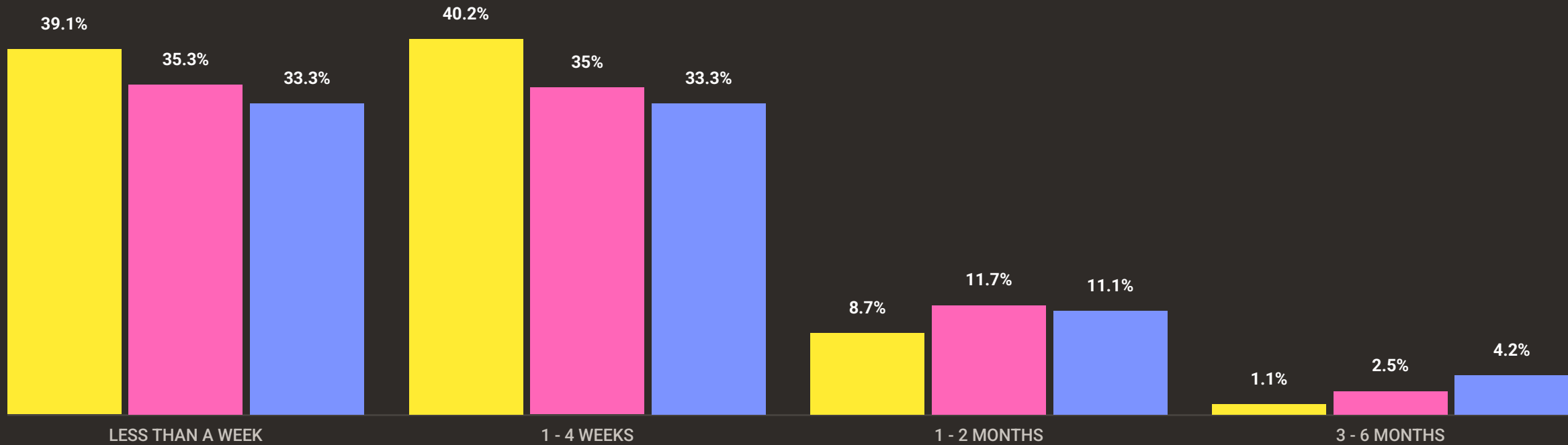
72%

**OF ALL BUYERS PURCHASED
THEIR CAR WITHIN 1 MONTH OF
THEIR FIRST TEST DRIVE**

Once a customer has physically experienced the car, the clock is ticking, and the vast majority will make the buying decision within four weeks, but you need to nurture the journey.

TEST DRIVE TO PURCHASE

New Car Buyer Used Car Buyer Ex-Demo Buyer



TEST DRIVE TO PURCHASE

Follow-Up Is Where Deals Are Won Or Lost

The month after a test drive is the most critical window in the whole sales process.

The question isn't whether they're buying. It's who from.

Move Fast On Hot Prospects

39% of new and 35% of used car buyers buy within a week of their test drive. Follow up within hours, not to check in, but to remove friction.

Have trade-in values, finance options, and availability ready to go.

New Car Buyers Are Decisive

79.3% buy within a month of their test drive. Just as many who buy in 1 week need up to 1 month to make the final commitment.

Do not write off the lead as dead too early. There's just as much potential in those buyers slower to convert.

Don't Abandon The Slow Deciders

Buyers who take longer aren't lost. They may be waiting on finances or a second opinion.

Just because they don't buy on the day doesn't mean they won't, a robust follow up process is a must.

PURCHASE AND FULFILLMENT

BUYER MINDSET

BUYER RESEARCH

BUYER ENQUIRY

BUYER TEST DRIVE

PURCHASE & FULFILLMENT

POST PURCHASE

71%

OF BUYERS PURCHASED A DIFFERENT MAKE FROM THEIR LAST CAR

Brand loyalty is not a given in 2026. For dealers, this means the vast majority of customers walking onto your lot are open to switching brands. For franchise dealers that depend on one marque, this is concerning. The majority of customers you sell to today are at risk of leaving you tomorrow.

PURCHASE AND FULFILLMENT

BRAND LOYALTY

BUYERS WHO PURCHASED THAT STAYED LOYAL TO THE SAME BRAND AS THEIR LAST CAR

49%

NEW CAR BUYERS

31%

EX-DEMO BUYERS

27%

USED CAR BUYERS

BRAND LOYALTY

Your Competitor's Customer Is Your Customer

Seven in ten buyers are open to switching brands.

Your value proposition and understanding the customers needs is key.

Make them feel they are making the right choice for them, not for you.

New Car Loyalty Is Real, But Not Guaranteed

49% of new car buyers return to the same brand. In the most diverse market we have experienced, robust, regular lifecycle touchpoints will help retain buyers.

Used Car Buyers Don't Care About The Badge

31% stick with the same brand. They're buying the best car for their budget.

Unless the buyer is clearly a brand enthusiast, sell the vehicle attributes, not the marque.

Every Trade-In Is An Audition

It tells you exactly what brand you're up against and what the buyer did and didn't like about it.

Use that. Tailor your pitch to the gaps their old car left.

POST PURCHASE

BUYER MINDSET

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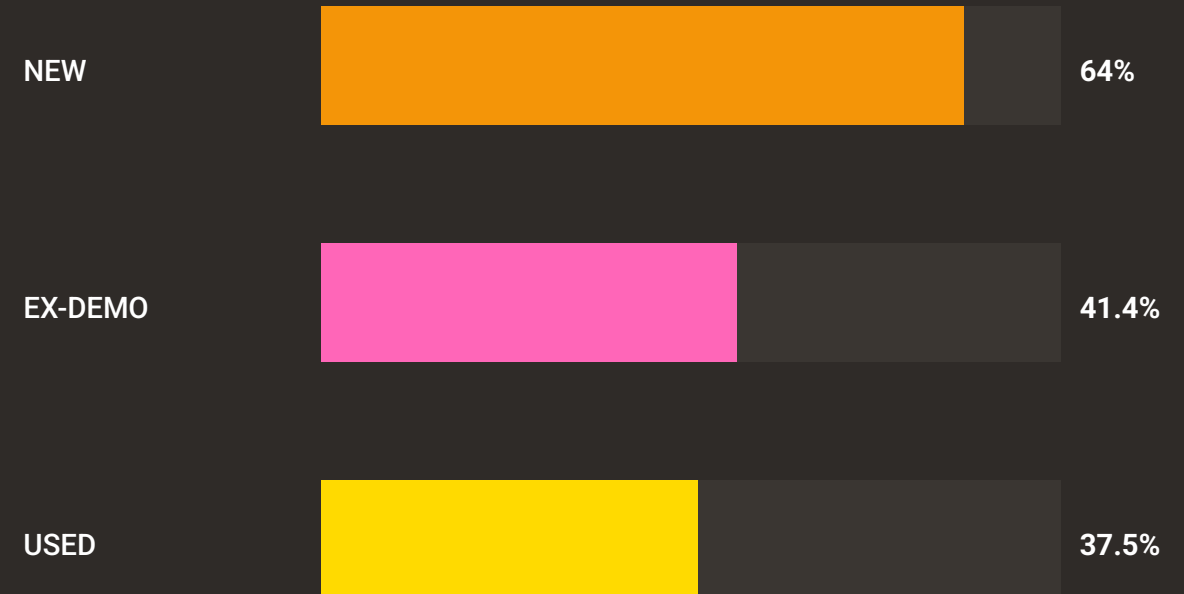
POST PURCHASE

48%

NEVER HEARD FROM THE DEALER POST-PURCHASE

Nearly half of all customers, after the transaction were never followed up..
Customer retention is future revenue, in a fragmented market, nurturing
post-purchase is not optional.

WHO HEARD BACK FROM THE DEALER



FOLLOW UP IS NOT OPTIONAL

Follow Up Is As Important As The Sale

The buyer chose you. In the most fragmented market we've had, with more consumer choice, you have delivered the best experience up to the point of sale. But the job does not finish there.

Don't let your hard work be undone by neglecting your customer post sale.

Do Not Assume Your CRM Process Is Flawless

Your dealership may have a defined post-sale CRM process. But if **48%** of Kiwi car buyers are not being followed up after purchase, you can't assume the process is working.

Audit your CRM process regularly. Identify and address the leaks in follow up continuously.

Productivity Unlocks Profit

Follow up post purchase drives referral business and repeat purchases.

Higher ratios of referred and retained customers make for more efficient use of your marketing spend making your business more profitable long term.

Follow Up Is At The Heart Of Advocacy

Great customer service breeds word-of-mouth advocacy.

Reputation and online reviews are the most important considerations to buyers as having the right car at the right price.

Providing a 360 degree customer service on this sale, makes selling the next car easier.

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motors 

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For Insights tailored to your dealership's needs and stock profile reach out to insights@trademe.co.nz