



5 Ways to Get Maximum Benefit from Mystery Shopping

Mystery Shopping is widely recognised as a valuable marketing and customer service tool. It provides objective and clear information on frontline staff performance, often within 48 hours. Other than top managers dealing with customers themselves the quality of this information is hard to beat.

What is often not recognised are the many ways a mystery shopping programme can be used. So, here are some ideas to consider:

1. Motivating Employees

Motivating staff on an ongoing basis is not easy. In over 10 years of delivering mystery shopping findings I have yet to experience any staff member not being impressed with a detailed and positive report written by a customer about his/her performance. Just think about it....if a complete stranger (representing a customer) provides you with a comprehensive report on how great you are at your job, would you be impressed?

Mystery Shopping provides a mechanism where companies can do this. In my experience, once completed correctly, this is one of the most valuable benefits of mystery shopping, leading directly to happier staff, more satisfied customers and ultimately bigger profits. The knowledge that the next customer might be a mystery shopper can heighten service awareness and thereby upgrade performance. In addition, establishing and monitoring standards is almost always well received by employees if it is presented in a positive manner. This is because such directives tend to eliminate confusion on the part of employees and increase motivation.

2. Video & Audio Mystery Shops Sample Video will be available shortly

Video and Audio mystery shopping is rapidly increasing in popularity. An invaluable training tool, the real power of video and audio mystery shopping is to effect fundamental change in the quality of service and sales delivery to customers. The reality of customer experiences is captured using covert state-of-the-art video & audio recording equipment. Evaluations are conducted nationwide by specially trained mystery shoppers. Recordings are digital which ensures the highest quality of picture and sound.

Video mystery shoppers either pose as customers or accompany real customers to record their experiences. Videos are normally supplied on high quality DVD, memory sticks or secure web based streaming. Although more expensive than traditional visits, the benefit of video is its ability to change staff behaviour, and that it provides certainty to management on how customers are treated.

Audio recording mystery shopping telephone calls or visits is a cost effective alternative that provides certainty on what was said and how the customer interaction was handled. Calls and customer visits are seamlessly recorded (Digital MP3 format) and easily accessed via a link on the report.

3. Monitoring Competitors

Keeping an eye on the competition is a valuable use of mystery shopping. Many of our clients conduct competitor mystery shops either to benchmark themselves off a recognised market leader or to gain sales process, operational and pricing information they can then react to. Knowing how competitors sell to customers, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their sales process, gives our clients a clear advantage. Mystery Shopping allows companies to differentiate their offering and sell successfully when in direct competition.

4. Internal Competition

Although central management benefit from competitor information provided by mystery shopping, frontline staff are often more interested in how they compare internally; with other individuals and locations.

Staff want to know how they perform in relation to their peers; are they one of the best locations in their Area/Region, are they above or below average, who is in the top 10, who has improved the most etc.

Many of our clients nurture this interest by publicly recognising or rewarding the best or most improved performers. There are many techniques for doing this, but the outcome is the same...promoting internal competition improves everybody's performance.

One of the reasons this works so well is that staff are being compared with their peers and not just company targets. A well developed mystery shopping programme should facilitate this by promoting a transparent mystery shopping culture and by providing findings that match company structures, for example:

- Individual staff member or location reports that include overall comparisons and trends
- District, Area or Regional summaries, including trends and SWOT analysis
- League tables that rank on performance and show percentage changes from previous waves
- Highlighting top performers and most improved locations
- Comparing findings and trends on Key Performance indicators

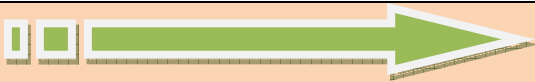
It's essential that the findings of each mystery shopping visit or call is fed back to frontline staff. It is often not important to provide individual feedback, as long as the team as a whole takes ownership of the report.

5. Improving Training

Ongoing training and assessment is vital to achieving the type of high-level customer service that commands customer loyalty - and repeat business. Mystery shopping is one of the best ways to determine the customer service your employees are giving, and what they're capable of once the proper training is provided.

An experienced mystery shopping company can design a programme that provides valuable feedback about the effectiveness of a company's employee selection and training. Valuable feedback that can save companies both time and money no matter what stage they are at:

- Evaluate the existing level of customer service prior to implementing a training programme: This establishes a benchmark and focuses employee training on aspects of service and sales performance that have been identified as weak. The result is a more targeted training programme that should result in real frontline improvements.
- Develop a training program: The most effective training programmes, whether companywide or more local, have clearly defined goals and seek measurable results. Measurement needs to be objective and from the customer's perspective, as this is what counts. Mystery shopping provides this.
- Evaluate recently completed training: The return on investment from any training programme can be measured by using a custom designed evaluation form developed to assess the areas in which training took place. Mystery shopping scheduled following a formal training program will highlight areas of success and continuing weakness. Over a longer period, continued improvement in specific areas can be documented, as can areas of persistent weakness.



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