

GET PAID TO SHOP!



Get Paid to Eat!
Get Paid to Cruise the World
Take Luxury Holidays
Play Golf
Stay in the World's Best Hotels
Visit Worldwide Theme Parks and Leisure Resorts
Bask on a Caribbean Island
Take an African Safari!

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The Mystery Shopping Experience



**Who Wants to Get paid to Shop, Eat at Top Class Restaurants,
Take a World Cruise, Sunbathe on Caribbean Shores?**

Sounds too good to be true, like an impossible dream perhaps?

Well it isn't a dream, this sort of thing happens every day to mystery shoppers!

As competition grows and pressure increases on companies to maintain or better still improve their market share, more and more openings will appear for mystery shoppers in all areas of commerce: in banks and building societies, shops and supermarkets, hotels and garages, on holiday flights and cruise ships, and much more.

**No Better Time to Become a Mystery Shopper No Better Time to Start
Your Own Mystery Shopping Business**

Firms need to know how they are perceived by customers and if rival firms are setting even higher standards and attracting customers from them.

Hence the need for regular checks to be made on all aspects of a business from product range and quality of choice, to staff attitudes, customer care, after sales service.

But there's no easy way for firms to investigate themselves. Staff who know they are being watched work harder, giving a false impression to researchers or, worse still, they consider their employers are spying on them, intent on catching them out and leading to staff termination and redundancy. So business owners ask market research companies to send everyday shoppers to evaluate them secretly and report on their findings.

Mystery shoppers go undetected into a business, seeing things as they really are, through the eyes of people who really matter - customers! What they see and the service they receive will not be affected by who they are and what influence they have over staff.

Would You Like to Be Part of a Business That's 100% Tried, Tested, and Proven to Work And Works Even Better in a Recession?

Here's why thousands of firms need people like you:

- Companies prefer to hire experienced freelance shoppers than employ new staff investigators who will quickly become recognized and of little further use.
- Poor service is the number one reason customers move elsewhere, meaning no company can afford to be complacent or fail to check standards of customer care. Even taking too long to answer the telephone or replenish shelves, having inadequate parking facilities, employee theft and poor staff-customer relations can force firms out of business fast.
- One dissatisfied customer tells an estimated sixteen people more about their experience meaning even greater loss of patronage and profits for business owners.

You Have a Captive Audience of Clients

By becoming a mystery shopper or starting your own business you'll be providing a much needed service to companies of all types and size. The work is exciting, you're working undercover, visiting many types of business, helping them investigate themselves, helping them increase their market share, helping explode their profits, helping them survive while others flounder! **For this they'll pay you well!**

**You'll Hear Several Names Used to Describe the Business and People Involved:
Mystery Shopping, Ghost Shopping, Focus Groups, Secret Shopping,
Service Evaluation, Market Research, Quality Assurance, Commercial
Intelligence Agent, and More!**

Most Mystery Shoppers Start Because It's Fun

..... they like to shop, eat out, take great holidays, and even get paid to collect all this amazing free stuff!

They enjoy the variety of their 'working' day, the fact that no two 'jobs' are ever the same, the certainty of more than enough opportunities existing every day to ensure they never find themselves unemployed, the simple truth that as business becomes more competitive the number of opportunities and rewards will continue to grow.

A regular mystery shopper can easily earn a full time wage for just a few hours work each day, sometimes much more depending on work itself and the time involved. If you can call this 'work'.

People of all ages can apply to become mystery shoppers, even children with their parents' permission, and many specialist openings exist for older, minority and special groups such as wheelchair users and housebound shoppers.

Lots of 'Work to Go Round

It seems hiring companies are constantly seeking more helpers. The business is growing rapidly as firms fight hard to maintain their market share and keep one step ahead of the opposition.

Whether you're looking to supplement your income, or make good (and profitable) use of your spare time; perhaps you are seeking a newer, more exciting and flexible way to earn money in your spare time (full time if you like), even start your own well-paid business, then the mystery shopping experience is just right for you!

Work for six, seven or even more companies, and your range of tasks, payments and perks can increase significantly. In fact, our expert consultants, highly successful mystery shoppers themselves, show how to gain profitable assignments every day of the week and

..... Best of All..... You Can Even Start Your Own International Mystery Shopping Business, Working Alone to Keep All Those Fabulous Free Goods and Services For Yourself, or Recruiting Others to Do The Work While You Bank Fees Ranging From Hundreds of Dollars a Week to Several Thousand!

Introduction to Mystery Shopping

Have you ever had a horrible meal in a restaurant or encountered a rude salesperson in a supermarket?

Have you ever received exceptional service at the garage, in a doctors' surgery, at the hairdressers perhaps?

Would you like your opinions to make a difference to the kind of service people receive in shops and other commercial outlets?



Can You Tell Cheap Plonk From Vintage Wine?

If so, you're just the kind of person millions of firms all over the world employ to judge their business through the eyes of those who really matter - customers!

Firms of all sizes employ people to shop and complete a questionnaire or report back on variety and choice of products, prices, in-store hygiene and cleanliness, efficiency of staff, store layout, length of queues at the checkout, and so on, in their own and competing outlets.

Tasks vary according to clients and requirements. One client might need to know how quickly staff answer telephone calls, something a mystery shopper can estimate from home, while another wants to know at what times of day checkout queues are longer than six people deep, meaning one or a team of mystery shoppers will visit stores over several days.

Why Firms Use Mystery Shoppers



“Mystery Shoppers Go Undetected Into a Business, Critique the Products and Services, and Submit a Completed Report to Their Employer.”

Leading U.S. market research company specializing in placement of mystery shoppers.

What they see and the service they receive will not be distorted by who they are or what influence they have over staff! It's a bit like role-playing or acting where the make-believe session is designed to resemble the real life experience as closely as possible.

There's a bit of an actor in every successful mystery shopper!

Employees who know they're being watched tend to perform better, hence the preference for a mystery shopper who appears like any other customer and will be treated exactly the same.

So mystery shoppers evaluating high street shops and supermarkets pretend to be genuine customers, and will select goods, ask questions, approach staff, visit the toilets, eat in the cafeteria, and go through the checkout in the same way as everyone else. No-one will know who they are or what they are really doing, not even management.

The great thing about mystery shopping is that you can often work hours that suit you best. And you'll even find our advice helps you pick and choose jobs you'll really enjoy and even the goods you want to take home free.

Take a look at just a handful of hundreds of offers in my email today:

- **Several openings exist for Internet users to shop online with major shops and to report back on appearance of web sites, ease and speed of navigating between links, choice of goods and services, price comparisons, delivery times, and so on. Major players in this league include ToysRUs (great for getting gifts for the kids at Christmas), and Amazon books. Payment varies between companies and most goods are yours to keep free of charge! All without ever leaving home!**

- **An international mystery shopping agency wants individuals to hand out drinks coupons in retail locations across Europe. The job pays \$8 an hour and you could even travel across Europe funding your trip from this one opportunity alone. What better way for students and backpackers to see the world on a shoestring budget?**
- **A leading US mystery shopping agency seeks individuals in all English-speaking countries to collect direct mail offers – commonly called ‘junk’ mail - dropping through their letterboxes each day, which must be bundled and posted back to the company. Payment is \$1 per item, return postage is provided. Another great way to work from home cashing in on stuff you normally hate!**
- **A UK agency requires hundreds of people to shop at three thousand locations across the UK and report back on their experiences. Payment is from £10 to £30 a shop. Choose one type of shop, choose several, work locally, cover the entire country. You could even work your way around Britain staying in hotels requiring mystery shoppers, eating in restaurants and fast food outlets all over the country, buying clothes to wear on your travels, visiting theme parks and other tourist attractions, even buying gifts to take home to your loved ones. Beat that for a free and easy lifestyle!**
- **A UK agency requires individuals to choose their own shopping venue from the list provided online and to write a few sentences about the experience for a chance to win £50. Visit those shops in real time and earn £50 in gift vouchers for every shop.**
- **Golfers - new and experienced - are needed to visit golf retail shops across the United States and ask staff questions to determine how helpful and knowledgeable they are. No purchase is necessary but £10 is paid for every shop.**
- **Hundreds of participants are required to visit banks all across America and return simple yes/no questionnaires about such as service, waiting times, length of queues, staff efficiency. Over three hundred locations exist for shoppers and foreign visitors are welcome to apply. Pay equates to \$10 per shop. Grab a Greyhound bus and travel coast to coast funding your trip as you go.**
- **A British-based company with stores all over Europe wants individuals to stand outside stores to ask customers leaving the store what they had bought and why. More importantly, the client needs to know why those leaving empty-handed went into the shop and why they left without buying.**
- **A UK seeks people to man a stall where shoppers can select sachets of different flavor crisp dips and record the number of times each flavor is selected in preference to others. The results will help the company determine whether choice varies according to geographical area or age and sex of testers.**
- **An international publishing company requires individuals to visit its web site and select three free reports to download from a selection of 100 plus to determine which categories are most popular and best suited to extensive one title marketing campaigns.**

- Another UK company is seeking full-time mystery shoppers to work in all areas of commerce all over the world.

Major Employers

Market Research Companies
Mystery Shopping Specialist Hiring Companies
Individual Businesses and Official Departments

Specifically:

Airports and Air Lines
Amusement Parks
Banks and Building Societies
Casinos
Chemist Shops
Cinemas
Clothing Shops
Computer Stores
Cruise Lines
Fast Food Restaurants
Financial Institutions
Florists
Golf Courses
Grocery Stores
Hardware Stores
Hotels
Off Licenses, Pubs, Wine Bars, Night Clubs
Pet Stores
Property Sellers
Restaurants
Retail Outlets
Specialty Stores
Takeaway and Food Delivery Specialists
Theme Parks
Tour Operators
Toy Stores

Most types of commercial concern use mystery shoppers to a greater or lesser extent. Witness a case heard the other day of an undertaker who hired someone to act as a bereaved parent to see how staff coped with the harrowing event. Another company, making skin creams and shampoo, pays shoppers to visit beauticians and hairdressers to determine how often their products are offered over rival brands.

Main Categories of Mystery Shopping



Comparison Shopping: Most assignments involve a comparison of one firm's performance against another, usually in the same field. Hence the reason you might be asked to purchase the exact same goods at several stores to see which is cheapest, and who offers the best, most efficient service. Most projects are on a local scale involving a comparison of stores in the same town or city.

Customer Loyalty/Competitive Positioning: Competitive positioning closely resembles comparison shopping, but in this case research takes place over a wider area. Where comparison shopping largely involves comparisons on a local scale, competitive positioning has much wider applications and normally involves the entire market in which the client operates. So, for example, a firm like Sainsbury's may use competitive positioning to assess how large a share of the UK market it has compared to Asda or other major competitor. Much of competitive positioning revolves around customer loyalty and is designed to win customers from other firms while also maintaining the client's own current market share.

In-Store Evaluation: Here the mystery shopper measures and evaluates actual against desired performance within the store, with the intention of highlighting strengths and weaknesses to suggest whatever corrective action is needed.

Impulse Buying: Few people buy just essentials and most go home with at least a few additional items, often purchased on impulse. Unplanned buys can amount to more than one-third of sales, making it vital that management understands what goods and display methods induce people to purchase non-essential items. Mystery shoppers are instructed to purchase whatever they fancy up to a specified amount after which choice is compared and buying patterns noted.

Qualitative Research: This often involves bringing people together into an informal setting, say a quiet corner in the bar of a small hotel or country inn where the purpose is to test and sample specific items and report back on findings. Because most work is conducted by independent research groups (sometimes called focus groups), not business owners or manufacturers themselves, people feel less inhibited in expressing their views about other people's goods and services. Exactly what the client wants!

Receiving Mail: The mystery shopper is simply asked to retain mail forwarded to his or her address as part of a local or regional exercise to test direct mail offers or act as a collection point for direct mail offers.

For example, an information publisher advertising in the likes of *'Exchange and Mart'* might want to know what the opposition is selling and how readers react to their own advertisements in the same magazine.

As a mystery shopper your job might be to write, phone, fax or even e-mail a long list of advertisers, posing as a potential buyer of such as business opportunity packages, following which you retain all communications and make a note of what was said in phone conversations, and so on. Some companies, notably direct mail specialists, include mystery shoppers as 'seeds' on mailing lists to ensure other companies are abiding by conditions on which their lists are rented.

Telephone Surveys: Not all mystery shopping involves making personal visits and much work takes place by telephone, fax or online. For example, a major high street bank recently hired mystery shoppers to phone local branches to check how fast and efficiently calls were answered. Telephone and Internet shoppers might also be asked to place orders in response to mail order or direct mail promotions. Numerous variations exist, as for example where people are hired to pose as irate customers wanting to air their grievance and demand redress. The objective is to check how efficiently staff handle the problem or what improvements were effected as a result of staff being recently trained in complaint management.

Internet Ordering and Research: More and more businesses gaining an online presence has generated huge demands for home-based mystery shoppers to comment on the appearance and user-friendliness of web sites, ease of navigation, product range and download times, delivery times, speed and manner of response to customer queries and comparison with competing companies on and off the Internet. Sometimes you will be asked to make specific purchases, often you can buy whatever you like up to a specific price, frequently all you will have to do is ask questions and compare prices and product range between the client and competing companies.

Other: The above is not a comprehensive list by any means and a wide range of alternative tasks might be assigned to mystery shoppers, such as conducting house-to-house enquiries, distributing samples in supermarkets, interviewing passers-by in the high street, and so on.

Typical Assignments



No two assignments are ever the same, something you will soon learn for yourself. In fact, thousands of different tasks are involved in millions of different environments.

That said, however, most work involves visiting retail premises to check stock levels, cleanliness and hygiene, staff attitude and courtesy towards customers, customer service, and so on.

As a typical example, imagine Store A faces a big drop in profits one week and hears that Store B, just up the street, is having to employ new staff to cope with a 200 per cent increase in visitors. A first reaction might be that Store A's customers have moved to Store B, for whatever reason.

Whether this is likely to be short term is anyone's guess, but no business can afford to wait to find out. Immediate action has to be taken to learn why customers have stopped coming to Store A, and where they are going instead. Store B? Possibly, but no one knows for certain, yet!

And, if customers are moving over to Store B, is it coincidence, some short-term irresistible offer from Store B, something related to Store A which has alienated its customers, or is it the sign of a deliberate attempt by Store B to poach customers from Store A? If so, what is the problem, what is the big incentive? Is it something Store A can copy to win business back?

Or can Store A better Store B's incentive and not only win back its own former customers, but perhaps a sizeable share of Store B's customers, too? Can these questions be answered by the manager of Store A or his staff actually visiting Store B or by questioning customers leaving the premises? Probably not!

It's a perfect scenario for employing mystery shoppers to check both stores, A and B, to determine which offers the best range of goods, whose staff are most helpful, who has the best pricing and incentives policy, and so on.

However, the example shows just one reason for employing mystery shoppers. In reality many more tasks are assigned to people who can act, convincingly, as everyday customers.

More Examples

- You might be asked to telephone a customer service hotline, posing as a customer with a problem to see how quickly your call is answered and how well staff respond to your needs.
- The manager of a high street supermarket might commission you to stand outside and count the number of customers leaving a competitor's premises and to learn which are the busiest times, what complimentary transport is offered, whether staff help customers to their vehicles, and so on.
- A wheelchair-bound colleague was asked to visit several departments in one large store, to see which members of staff were most helpful and to determine the accuracy of earlier complaints from physically-challenged shoppers that certain members of staff were rude and insensitive to their special needs.
- On another occasion she was asked to visit several stores to determine which were most user-friendly to shoppers in wheelchairs and to suggest ways for the client to improve his own service to disabled shoppers.
- Another colleague was asked to be deliberately rude to sales assistants to check their reaction, and was even paid to shoplift to test response and efficiency of store detectives! To show how effective mystery shopping can be for users, the colleague asked to shoplift failed to be apprehended, suggesting security was slack and forcing management to initiate newer, more efficient security methods.
- A company specializing in, say, board games, will invariably use teams of people (focus groups) to play the game and report back on entertainment potential, clarity of rules and instructions, ease of play, and to suggest any improvements to make the product more popular to more potential buyers before the game is ever brought to market.

What You Will Need



Essential personal characteristics are reliability and confidentiality as well as a genuine desire to do your best and help your employer achieve his objectives. This means behaving professionally at all times, being punctual and reliable, and ensuring your responses are accurate and complete.

Occasionally, special experience is required, as for example where someone is engaged to sample wines in a local pub, where it's reasonable to expect that person enjoys and can differentiate between various types of wine.

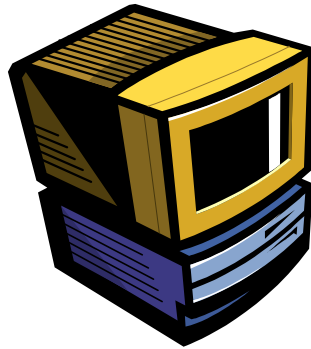
Alternatively, certain physical characteristics might be essential, as in the case of our wheelchair-bound friend who regularly inspects facilities for the physically challenged, and a colored colleague who regularly tests attitudes towards minority racial groups, while another elderly friend checks how young and older shop assistants react when she feigns a memory lapse or sudden loss of balance!

The same elderly shopper was engaged to fake a heart attack to check how well the store's first-aiders coped under pressure!

Good communication skills are vital and you must be able to communicate your experiences clearly and concisely. Except for telephone and Internet marketing, transportation is essential. A reliable car lets you carry out several jobs in one day, although public transport is adequate for most assignments.

A home telephone is vital and is the source of most job offers. Fax and answer phone are essential, too, allowing hirers to stay in constant touch and help you chase offers fast before they are delegated elsewhere. Many opportunities are emailed or posted on the Internet making a home computer a virtual necessity.

Getting Assignments



Countless Opportunities Can Be Found on the Internet

Work can be found from:

- 1) Market research companies and specialist mystery shopping agencies;
- 2) Media advertisements placed by market research companies, specialist hiring companies, companies themselves requiring shoppers;
- 3) Listings on Internet bulletin boards, newsgroups and discussion groups, or emailed to known candidates.
- 4) Team leaders for companies having your details on file.
- 5) Word-of-mouth from friends and associates involved in the mystery shopping business;
- 6) Your own mystery shopping business.

Writing Direct to Market Research Companies and Replying to Media Advertisements

Most openings are advertised in national and local newspapers especially by market research companies with extensive regional and national clientele. In such cases, a telephone number is normally provided from which to request further information. If opportunities are available when you phone you will probably be sent an application form which when completed will be kept on file against suitable openings occur in future.

One of the best ways to find regular work is to approach market research companies direct, from advertisements in *Yellow Pages* and listings of member companies affiliated to national and international market research organizations.

Even market research companies which don't use mystery shoppers to any great extent may still require field workers to ask questions of shoppers and passers-by or to distribute questionnaires or man stalls in supermarkets from which to distribute samples of food and drink.

When applying 'cold', that is without knowing what vacancies exist, it's usually best to write a simple letter offering yourself as a mystery shopper. Not all companies like to answer the phone all day to people enquiring about jobs and in such cases it's unlikely the person on the other end of the phone will record information about you for future use.

A letter or curriculum vitae is different, and means you can tell the potential employer everything he needs to know without feeling you are interrupting or making a nuisance of yourself. Include a photograph and details of when you are available for work, how far you can travel and whatever experience you already have. List your hobbies and interests for specialist assignments.

Illustration One shows a sample contact letter for an absolute newcomer who has spotted a firm called 'Market Ree-Search' advertising for mystery shoppers in a national newspaper. Illustration Two shows a typical cover letter and resume/curriculum vitae. Note this type of resume is not the same as that you might use for securing long-term, permanent employment, but should be enough for hirers to consider placing you on file.

Unless your handwriting is really neat and tidy it's a good idea to type your letter and curriculum vitae (resume) or have them prepared by a professional secretarial bureau.

Anyone intending to apply to several companies might have a template letter produced on disk, giving name, address and personal details, leaving only the recipient's details to add for a fresh, customized letter each time.

The letter in Illustration One can be altered slightly for sending to market research agencies listed in *Yellow Pages* and from market research agencies' own lists of member companies. Instead of suggesting in the first sentence that you have seen opportunities advertised, say something like: "I am keen to get started as a mystery shopper and wonder if your firm has suitable openings." Then continue more or less verbatim from paragraph two onwards.

Information Gathered From Internet Bulletin Boards, News and Discussion Groups, or Emailed to Interested Parties

Literally hundreds of places exist online to keep shoppers updated on current openings all over the world. Some sites list details for you to access at your leisure, others email up-to-date information on request. A useful list of groups and sites is provided with this package.

From Team Leaders For Companies Having Your Details On File

Once you are known to a potential hiring company your details will probably be kept on file pending suitable assignments, at which time a team leader will probably provide details of the shop and make sure you're available. Once you have applied to a hiring company, even if you have not been placed on file, don't continually pester them for work or to check your place in the queue. There probably isn't a waiting list, companies will invariably check their records for people best suited to

forthcoming assignments. Make a nuisance of yourself and you might find you've been dropped from the list.

Word-of-Mouth From Friends and Associates Involved in the Mystery Shopping Business

Join a few Internet mystery shopping discussion groups and you will find an enormous camaraderie exists even between people competing for similar shops. In my daily email, alongside sometimes hundreds of shop offers, I'll find letters from colleagues in the business telling me about new opportunities I might otherwise miss.

By Starting Your Own Mystery Shopping Business

Well, it goes without saying, doesn't it, if you start your own mystery shopping business, you'll get first pick of the highest paying, most interesting jobs with the best perks! Go for it!

Now It Gets Very Exciting!

Most market research companies and firms employing mystery shoppers work through supervisors whose role is to delegate batches of work throughout the area. If a major firm wants people to work in its own branches all over the country, it will usually be the task of regional supervisors to delegate and collate assignments through a small team of regular shoppers.

In such cases, the supervisor will phone likely candidates for a particular job and will continue doing so until all vacancies are filled. Hence the reason for a home telephone line and an answer phone for chasing calls made during your absence.

Most work will be assigned about a week before the appropriate event and you will be asked to confirm or reject the appointment. If you accept you will normally receive an instruction pack or special training a few days before the shop. Read everything carefully and make sure you understand what is required. Some assignments will be on a specific date at a particular time, while others might ask you to shop any time during a fixed period. Understand and abide by these instructions.

A Typical Working Day



Choose Times That Suit You Best!

Your instructions might be to visit a specific store on a particular day at an appropriate time or within a pre-determined period. Almost certainly the hiring company will be testing or evaluating something which exclusively occurs at a specific time and place. It might be they want to know whether supplies run short of particular items at busy times, or if checkout operators become harassed, the store overruns with children, trolleys are in short supply, and so on.

Sometimes you will be allowed to choose your own time to shop, based on the theory that dirty toilets and unpleasant staff might be a permanent problem, not restricted to busy times only, in which case the client needs to know just how widespread such problems are or if conditions vary between different shifts, on different days.

Be sure to shop at the appointed time, no sooner, no later. Arrive early and go somewhere quite away from the shop and take a long last look at your instructions. A park or coffee shop is ideal.

Make sure you know what you have to do. You can't keep on referring to your instructions during the shop, except if it's quiet or looks like you're reading your shopping list. A small notepad is useful, doubling as a shopping list and reminder of essential features of the shop and for recording important details. Try always to look as if you are checking things you have bought against those you still have to buy.

Note unusual requests such as information which might be required about other shops in the vicinity, whether you have to count supplies of a particular product or number of supervisors in the store at the appropriate time, if you have to record the name of the assistant who served you, and so on.

Here's a great tip we have used on occasion to avoid your notes being spotted by staff and management in the store. Use a simple code system, such as writing one letter in the alphabet in advance of actual letters of particular names or snippets of information.

For example, imagine you want to record the name of the supervisor you consulted about a particular matter. Say her name was Janet. Rather than record that name in your book, do it like this:

KBOFU

Solution to code: K (follows J), B (follows A), O (follows N), F (follows E), U (follows T) Hence JANET. Or even KBOFU!

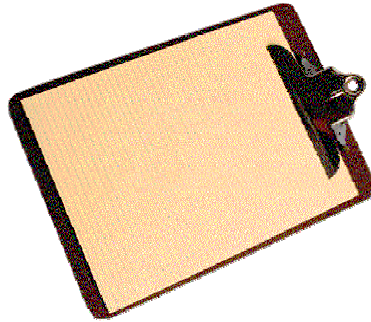
Try to remain as inconspicuous as possible throughout the shop. No-one is going to bother you, even if you are highly conspicuous, as long as you don't give the impression you are up to mischief in which case management and staff might have *their* eyes on *you*.

Try not to worry when things go wrong, if you are suspected of shoplifting, for example, or someone asks for an explanation of your 'odd' behavior. Just explain you are a mystery shopper and show them your instruction pack.

When you've finished go somewhere quiet as before - a coffee shop is ideal - and make sure you have done all that was asked of you. It's a good idea to complete your questionnaire and report right away, while the events are still fresh in your mind, and while you still have a chance to gather outstanding information. This is especially important if you have a series of mystery shops in one day or you run the risk of confusing one shop with another and alienating the agency that appointed you.

Keep copies of all reports, questionnaires, receipts and notes about a particular shop for personal use as well as for querying payments and preparing your own accounts and tax returns.

Paperwork



Virtually all shops culminate in a report to be posted (snail mail or email), faxed or relayed by phone.

The following are the most common formats.

Multi-Response Questionnaire

Mystery Shopping Assignment Form

Store Name

Shopper's Name

Shopper's Telephone Number

Date of Shop

Please Circle Your Appropriate Response

1) How clean was the store?

Very Moderately Unclean

2) How busy was the store?

Very (40 customers or more) Moderately (More than 20 but less than 40 customers)

Not Busy (0 - less than 20 customers, not counting yourself)

3) How long was the queue at the checkout?

Short (less than 2 customers or more)

Moderate (3 to 4 customers)

Long (5 customers or more)

4) Were any queues longer than others at checkouts?

Yes

No

If you answered 'yes' please give further details below.

5) How helpful were staff?

Very

Moderately

Less than Helpful

6) How clean were the toilets?

Very

Moderately

Not Clean

If you answered 'Not Clean' please give further details below.

7) Based on your assignment would you shop at this establishment again?

Yes

No

Not

Sure

Return form by (date) to: Name and Address of Mystery Shopping Company or Other Hiring Company.

Simple Yes/No Questionnaire

Mystery Shopping Assignment Form

Store Name

Shopper's Name

Shopper's Telephone Number

Date of Shop

Please Circle Your Appropriate Response

Example:

Was the store clean and tidy? Yes No

Was the store busy? Yes No

Were the toilets clean? Yes No

Were any queues longer than others at checkouts? Yes No

Were staff helpful? Yes No

Were all staff properly dressed in store uniform? Yes No

Were you greeted in a friendly manner? Yes No

Were you offered help to transport your goods to your car? Yes No

Did staff thank you for your custom? Yes No

Based on your assignment would you shop at this establishment again? Yes No

Return form by (date) to: Name and Address of Mystery Shopping Company or Other Hiring Company.

Open Questions

Sometimes 'open' questions are given which require a more detailed and personal response. For example:

Describe your first impressions on entering the shop.

Tell how this restaurant compares with others you have visited as a private individual, not as a mystery shopper.

Essay Type Report

Often you will simply be asked to shop and report back in your own way regarding impressions formed before, during and after the shop. Here your school essay writing skills will finally prove worthwhile!

Tips

- Be sure to complete forms and questionnaires as soon as possible after the shop while your memory is fresh.
- Additionally, most companies require reports by a specified date to ensure a streamlined evaluation. Your lateness could cause problems for the employing company who might in turn cause problems for you, by refusing to pay you!

- Have a copy made of each report in case discrepancies arise or yours gets lost in the post.

Getting Paid



How and when you get paid depends on whether you act as freelance or employee of the market research or hiring company, or you are self-employed and running your own mystery shopping business.

As an employee of the researching company you will probably be paid in the same way as other employees, and will most likely have National Insurance and Income Tax deducted at source.

Freelancers and self-employed might be asked to invoice after each shop or to sign an appropriate section of the instructions pack confirming the task has been completed and indicating what payment is due.

Expenses might be paid before or just after the shop and you will probably have to submit receipts for items claimed.

Most firms pay once a month on submission of claim forms detailing fees, expenses and items you are allowed to buy and take home.

Tips



- Be careful to be seen as an ordinary shopper, not as someone obviously spying on staff or noting prices, selection, store layout, and so on. Try to blend in with the surroundings by dressing like the ‘average’ customer and not spending too long in any particular area or staring continuously in one direction.
- ‘Practice’ being a mystery shopper before applying for work. A friend, now a very successful mystery shopper, shortly to start her own business, offered to mystery shop for acquaintances in various lines of business.
- Give a clear indication of your own likes and preferences when applying for work and increase your chances of gaining valuable items to take home free.
- Your most likely bet for ‘freebies’ is with firms selling perishables and low-value goods.
- Look for work with several companies, thereby reducing the chance of becoming well known and harder to employ. Anyone contemplating a full-time career should approach several recruitment firms and be willing to accept most kinds of assignment in various commercial sectors over a wide geographic area.
- It’s very unlikely that anyone will gain enough work with one company to generate more than pocket money, unlike another person who approaches several potential employers and also offers herself for work in other areas of market research. The exception is where one hiring company or market research bureau provides a contract excluding you from working for anyone else. Treat such offers with caution and consider only if payment is high for regular openings.
- Most application forms ask whether you are working for other companies. This presents benefits and problems for mystery shoppers. Working for other companies shows you are experienced and trusted by other employers as well as, sometimes, indicating you are working for a major competitor, and might possibly be biased in favor of another company.

- Make yourself available at all times, at short notice, and look forward to a hectic and well-paid career as a mystery shopper. In time you can expect to receive plenty of referral business from firms you have worked for previously, as well as through fellow mystery shoppers and their supervisors who are happy to recommend you to others.
- Mystery shoppers are invariably good actors, so to speak. 'Mystery' means what it says and anyone who looks ruffled, embarrassed or conspicuous will not receive regular assignments. Practice being a mystery shopper at home on the Internet and in shops and stores. Get someone to ask questions about the shop to check your observation and memory skills.
- Take it all in your stride, study other shoppers in similar environments before accepting an assignment, and just do your best at pretending to be one of them.
- Always maintain confidentiality and never give outsiders details of work carried out for other companies, especially rival firms.
- Consider starting your own small mystery shopping business, beginning with local firms which you visit in person and later expanding into a larger set-up visiting more distant locations and seconding your own representatives. Learn the ropes first as a mystery shopper, take note of all that goes on, retain copies of all documentation and questionnaires, keep a diary of events and compile a database of firms using mystery shoppers. Branch out when you have the appropriate level of confidence and expertise.
- Despite the benefits of accepting whatever work is offered, it is sometimes a good idea to focus on specific areas, such as banks and building societies, restaurants and hotels, where specialist knowledge and experience could make you more desirable to major hiring companies.
- Keep receipts which will be needed to pay you later. Make copies of everything connected with the shop, such as bus tickets, assignment details, rough notes, reports. Keep records of employing and hiring companies too.
- Start an ideas file in case you might one day start your own mystery shopping business.
- Some shops have strict deadlines for accepting, undertaking and returning reports. Stick to those deadlines or be labeled unprofessional, unreliable, and risk losing all work with the establishment involved and the hiring company!
- Decline jobs you won't enjoy or might compromise your principles. A committed teetotaler, for example, might feel uncomfortable handing out drinks vouchers in pubs and wine bars, as might a lifelong vegetarian assigned to butchers shops and fishmongers.
- Be as accurate and thorough as possible both in doing the shop and reporting your findings. Answer questions clearly and thoroughly but don't waffle. If you mean

‘dirty’, say ‘dirty’, don’t feel obliged to gloss over the company’s bad points. They have employed you to be honest, to be their eyes and ears, they need you to be honest and open! Be precise, don’t repeat points, although you can underline or otherwise emphasize important comments.

- Don’t comment on matters not associated with the assignment. For example, if you are asked to count people leaving the shop, don’t include copious notes on the state of the toilets and the fact your favorite brand of beans were sold out.
- Work at improving your skills of communicating in spoken and written word. Use the right words to describe your thoughts and feelings and don’t use words you *think* are appropriate, know they are!
- Don’t try to impress others with your writing skills and extensive vocabulary. If they need a writer or speaker, they’ll find one! So use everyday words to communicate your thoughts and write, preferably type your reports for the clearest, neatest presentation possible.
- Never, ever, use sheets of lined paper torn from the children’s exercise books. Be professional, buy yourself a ream of quality white paper for typed and written reports. Anyone who has trouble writing straight lines can lay a ruled sheet of paper under the top plain sheet and be guided by the lines showing through.
- For nearby shops visit once as a genuine shopper so you’ll know which areas to evaluate during the real assignment.
- Respond to job offers fast. Firms do not like to be kept waiting and even where shops are not allocated ‘first come, first served’ you might still alienate a potential employer by appearing less enthusiastic than other shoppers.
- Make sure hirers can reach you at all times, if not in person, then at least by leaving a faxed or recorded telephone message. Anyone proving too hard to reach, especially for urgent jobs, will be dropped from the list.
- Read the rules and abide by them. If it says ‘enter the shop at 9 am’, don’t do it two hours later. If it says ‘fax your report’, do just that. If they ask for email or telephoned reports, that’s what you give!
- Only apply for work because you enjoy the experience and not just for money! Boredom, stress and apathy will show through and might even make you more noticeable to staff.
- Don’t be surprised to hear you have been checked yourself during the shop or afterwards. Some shops use closed circuit cameras to check, how discretely the mystery shopper performs a task and whether that person does in fact do all that is asked of her. Some firms will even assign other shoppers to work the same store, at the same time, with the same instructions, to check consistency of answers.

- Be totally up-front and honest about everything in your report and questionnaire as well as your claim forms. Don't tell lies about bus fares or distance traveled to shop, and so on. While you might get away with it once in a while, you will eventually be caught and dropped from the list. Don't take the risk!
- Many successful mystery shoppers, having gained experience with other companies, begin working independently, by targeting potential clients in person, by telephone or mail. While shopping for the family, a friend with several years' experience approached the manager of her local supermarket with suggestions for improving their performance and offering herself as a mystery shopper. Having gained one regular client, the exercise was repeated until eventually she had enough work to begin turning down outside assignments.

Summary

Not a get-rich-quick scheme by any means, except for firms employing their own mystery shoppers, but most certainly a very good way to make money from shopping and maybe even get a nice selection of goodies for free!

As the fight for profit intensifies, more and more firms will look to mystery shoppers to help them win new business and increase customer loyalty.

Above all enjoy this amazing new opportunity awaiting you!

Illustration One

Sample Letter In Response To Advertisement For Mystery Shoppers

Ima Shopper

Shoppers Villa
Opportunity Town
Disguise County

Email: Mystery@shopping.com

Miss U R Ann Advertiser
Market Ree-Search
Your Offices
High Street
Money County

Date

Dear Miss Advertiser

I spotted your advertisement for mystery shoppers in my local newspaper and would very much like to get started in this kind of work.

I am 38 years old and married with two teenage children. I work part-time in the Golden Years Nursing Home.

My hobbies are entering competitions and reading. I shop regularly at Asda and Safeway, although I have a car and can easily travel thirty miles or so from home.

I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience and to hopefully being considered as a mystery shopper for your company.

Your sincerely

Ima Shopper

Ima Shopper

This letter can be altered slightly for sending to market research agencies listed in *Yellow Pages* and from market research agencies' own lists of member companies. Instead of suggesting in the first sentence that you have seen opportunities advertised, say something like: "I am keen to get started as a mystery shopper and wonder if your firm has suitable openings." Then continue more or less verbatim from paragraph two onwards.

Illustration Two

Typical Cover Letter and Resume/Curriculum Vitae

Ima Shopper

Shoppers Villa
Opportunity Town
Disguise County

Email: Mystery@shopping.com

Miss U R Ann Advertiser
Market Ree-Search
Your Offices
High Street
Money County

Date

Dear Miss Advertiser

I understand your company specializes in hiring mystery shoppers and would like to offer myself for whatever openings might be available.

I enclose my curriculum vitae which I hope will tell you all you need to know about me. If there is anything else you need to know please contact me any time.

I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience and to hopefully being considered as a mystery shopper for your company.

Yours sincerely

Ima Shopper

Ima Shopper
Attachment: Photograph

Curriculum Vitae/Resume

**Avril Harper
Avallan
High Hesleden
Hartlepool
Cleveland
TS27 4PZ**

Email: avallan@aol.com

Date of Birth

Nationality

Educational Qualifications

.....
.....
.....
.....

Current Employment

.....

(give dates and name and address of employer)

Previous Employment

(Reverse order. Give dates and name and address of employer)

.....
.....

Skills

(Emphasize any that might be of use to the company concerned or mystery shopping agencies in general)

.....

.....

Special Interests and Hobbies

(Emphasize any that might be of use to the company concerned or mystery shopping agencies in general)

.....

.....

Worldwide Mystery Shopping Companies, Newsgroups and Discussion Groups, Link Sites

Mystery Shopping Hiring Companies (Apply Online)

A & M Business Services

www.ambussvcs.com

Hotels US

A & A Merchandising

www.aamerch.com

Australia, Canada, US

ABA Quality Monitoring Ltd.

www.aba.co.uk

UK

Acra Inc. Secret Shopping and Market Research

www.secretshopacra.com

Amusement Parks

Ann Michaels and Associates Ltd.

www.ishopforyou.com

US

Anonymous Shopper

www.anonymousshopper.com

US

Associate Consumer Evaluations

www.acemysteryshopping.com

US

At Your Service Marketing

www.aysm.com

Southern States USA

Bestmark

www.bestmark.com

US

BMA Mystery Shopping Services

www.mystery-shopping.com

US

Business Evaluation Services

www.mysteryshopperservices.com

US

Check Up Marketing Secret Shopping Services

www.checkupmarketing.com

US

Confero

www.conferoinc.com

USA

Corporate Images Retail Service Evaluations

www.retailserviceevaluations.com

US

Courtesy Counts

www.courtesycounts.com

Critique International

www.critiqueinternational.com

International

Customer 1st

www.customer-1st.com

Website Shopping

Customer Perspectives

www.customerperspectives.com

USA and Canada

Restaurant, hotel, airport, highway, retail opportunities

Customer's View Inc.

www.customersview.com

US and Canada

Customer Viewpoint Evaluators

www.baievaluators.com

Feedback Plus

www.gofeedback.com

US

Focus On Service

www.focusonservice.com

Restaurants USA

Graymark Security Group

www.graymarksecurity.com

Nightclubs and cruise lines

Green and Associates

www.greenandassociates.com

US

HDE Mystery Shopping Specialists

www.dunlapenterprises.com

US

Hilli Dunlap Enterprises

www.dunlapenterprises.com

Hindsight

www.hindsight.com

US

Investigative Marketing

www.investigativemarketing.com

USA

ICC Decision Service

www.iccds.com

US

Investigative Marketing

www.investigativemarketing.com

US, UK, Australia

Jack In the Box

www.jacksguest.com

Restaurants US

Jancyn

www.jancyn.com

US

MacPherson Mystery Shopping

www.macphersonmysteryshopping.org.uk

UK

Market Image

www.phantom.marketimage.com

US

Marketing Systems Unlimited

www.msultd.com

Full time shoppers US

Michelsons

www.michelson.com

Mystery shopping and focus groups. US

Mystery Shopper USA

www.bmilttd.com

US and Internet Shopping

National Shopping Service

www.nssmysteryshoppers.com

US

Nationwide Integrity

www.nationwideintegrity.com

US

Person to Person Quality

www.persontopersonquality.com

US

Prove of Orlando

www.proveoforlando.com

USA

Pulse Back

www.pulseback.com

Quality Assurance Consultants

www.qacinc.com

Eastern States USA

Quality Check

www.undercovershoppers.com

USA

Quality Marketing

www.quality-marketing.com

US

Rapid Chek

www.rapidchek.com

Reality Check

www.rcmysteryshopper.com

US

Restaurant Shops

www.ranw.com

Retail Biz Consulting

www.retailbiz.com

US and Canada

Retail Service Evaluations

www.RetailServiceEvaluations.com

US

S G Marketing Group

www.sgmarketing.com

Canada and US

Second To None

www.second-to-none.com

US

Secret ShopNet

www.secretshopnet.com

US and Canada

Sensors Quality Management

www.sqm.ca

Airlines US and Canada

Service Advantage International

www.servad.com

US

Service Intelligence

www.ecom.ca

US

Service Performance Group

www.serviceperformancegrp.com

USA

Service Quest

www.service-quality.com

Worldwide

Service Sleuths

www.howardservices.com

USA

Service Trac

www.servicetrac.com

US

Shoney's Inc.

www.shoneysrestaurants.com

Restaurants US

Shoppers' Critique International

www.shopperscritique.com

International

Shoppers Inc.

www.shopperjobs.com

Mainly midwest USA

Shoppers View

www.shoppersview.com

US

Sights 'n Service

www.mysteryshop.com

US

Speedmark

www.speedmarkweb.com

US

Spot Checks Mystery Shopping

www.spotchecks.com

International

Trendsource

www.trendsource.com

International

Useful Sites

Mystery Shopping Providers Association

www.mysteryshop.org

Internet Groups

qualityshoppers@onelist.com
mysteryShopping@yahoogroups.com
qualityshoppers@yahoogroups.com
SEShoppers@yahoogroups.com
USAmysteryshoppers@yahoogroups.com
NEShoppers@yahoogroups.com
MAShoppers@yahoogroups.com
PSShoppers@yahoogroups.com
secretShopping@topica.com
secret-shopper@onelist.com
secretshoppers@onelist.com
qualityshoppers@yahoogroups.com
mysteryshopper@egroups.com
mysteryshopper@onelist.com
mysteryshopper@topica.com
mystery-shopper@yahoogroups.com
mysteryshoppingleads@onelist.com
mysteryshopsupdate@onelist.com
danorton@customersview.com
shops@megastar.net
mysteryMerch@listbot.com
LotsOShops@aol.com
jobs@campaigners.com
info@double-check.com
mysteryshopping@onelist.com
qualityshoppers@topica.com
shoppermatch@onelist.com
shops-r-us@onelist.com
qualityshoppers@topica.com
sshoppers@onelist.com
Theschedulers@onelist.com
VAMSleads@onelist.com

United States Internet Groups (By Location)

alabamashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
alaska shoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
arizona shoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
arkansas shoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
california shoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
colorado shoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
connecticut shoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
delawareshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Floridashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Georgiashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Hawaiiishoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Idahoshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Illinoisshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.co
Indianashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Iowashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Kansasshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Kentuckyshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Louisianashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Maineshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Marylandshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Massachusettsshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Michiganshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Mississippishoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Missourishoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Montanashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Nebraskashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
NorthCarolinashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
NorthDakotashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Nevadashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
NewHampshireshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
NewJerseyshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
NewMexicoshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
NewYorkshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Ohioshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Oklahomashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Oregonshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Pennsylvaniashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
RhodeIslandshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
SouthCarolinashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
SouthDakotashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Tennesseehoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Texasshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Utahshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Vermontshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Virginiashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Washingtonshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

WestVirginiashoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Wisconsinshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Wyomingshoppers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Thank You For Reading. I wish you success in your chosen venture.

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