



Retail Consumer Confidence During Coronavirus and Beyond

An Ipsos Point of View



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An Ipsos Point of View by **Pat Brassil**, Director, US Mystery Shopping

Despite many store closures and shelter-in-place mandates, people still need to shop for necessities: groceries, hardware and home goods, electronics to support in-home entertainment needs and stock their home offices. Maintaining new norms can be uncomfortable for people as they learn to keep our distance while surrounded by mask-wearing strangers. Shoppers want to trust that retailers are taking active measures to keep customers and staff safe. So how do retailers address those safety concerns and get consumers comfortable coming back to stores as restrictions begin to ease?

Cocooning Consumers

First, retailers need to understand how extensively shopper routines have been disrupted. A recent Ipsos poll found 85% of consumers are staying home, except when leaving for necessary reasons (food, work, etc.), and 63% are avoiding shopping in physical stores. This growing anxiety among consumers around leaving their homes, paired with the increased demand for many essential items, is promoting many Americans to try new brands, products, services and features. This is especially true for Buy-Online-Pickup-In-Store (BOPIS), curbside, and home delivery of food.

Although there is a willingness to try new products and services, consumers must be able to trust the brands that deliver them. An Ipsos study conducted in March 18 and 19 showed that 58% of respondents said grocery stores had a responsibility to help combat the spread of the virus.

Mystery Shopping Insights

Consumers needs have changed almost overnight leading to a sudden growth in Buy-Online-Pick-Up-In-Store (BOPIS) and delivery services due to social distancing restrictions and safety concerns. Businesses are being asked to quickly put in place a Covid-19 appropriate customer journey that is exceptional, cost-effective all while standing out amongst the competition. That is no easy feat.

Customers and brands alike want to trust that in-store employees are following safety guidelines. They also want to trust that staff are enforcing the guidelines for other customers who might not be adhering to new social distancing norms. Although shopping has changed radically, one thing hasn't: mystery shopping can help ensure that the shopper experience is what is supposed to be and fully delivers on your brand promises. It can answer many key business questions, including: How are new users experiencing your online and/or mobile ordering platforms? Are order accuracy and product quality standards being maintained? How are higher order volumes impacting delivery, curbside and pickup wait times? Are stores providing regular social distancing reminders to customers and staff?

These answers can help retailers evaluate whether they are currently meeting the needs of their customers. By pinpointing any service gaps along the customer experience and rectifying it, businesses will gain consumers' confidence and earn their trust.

Trust in the Future

One thing we know is that at some point, we will emerge from this social distancing world. When remains to be seen. The best thing a retail business operating in the pandemic can do is to recognize consumers are still there, they are just consuming differently. Look for insights and take advantage of innovative research tools to help you accurately understand your consumers' changing needs and ensure your retail network is consistently meeting, even exceeding those needs. Investing in gathering this information will allow retailers to provide a thoughtful low-stress customer experience that functions with ease and efficiency. As more stores begin to reopen, those that can prove they provide a safe experience will win.

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