

TAKE MYSTERY SHOP RESULTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL WITH A FOCUSED ACTIVATION PLAN

An Ipsos Article

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GAME CHANGERS



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Mystery shopping, also known as “secret shopping,” is a solution retailers and brand marketers have used for years to measure customer-facing operational execution on brand promises, as well as to collect competitive intelligence. The data obtained in a properly executed mystery shopping program can be invaluable, but many companies are sometimes challenged when it comes to translating results in a way that leads to tangible business performance improvements.

How can companies best capitalize on the volumes of mystery shop performance management data they gather across their networks? Three overarching factors are critical. The first two are vital and well-understood by many companies, if not always realized. The third is what can truly elevate a program, deliver far greater ROI, and separate a company from its competition.

Executive Level Support

As with any major initiative, there must be executive level support for the program and its value proposition. It must align with an organization's overall customer experience strategy and brand promise. There should be commitment for ongoing executive-level visibility and ideally, company-wide engagement with the program.

Field Management Support

It is imperative to gain buy-in from field management up front, including ensuring they have a role in program design. Without an effective communication approach here, there can be resistance among field staff, low morale by front-line team members, and attempts by managers to game the system instead of focusing on improving performance.

Activate the “Last Mile”

While there is usually talk of making results “actionable,” this is often a vaguely defined concept. This “last mile” of turning performance execution data in the form of mystery shops into a better experience for customers and improved business results for the company is what can easily trip up organizations.

The good news is that there is a process that can be undertaken for companies to ensure they are maximizing their mystery shopping ROI and yes, activating results. The key components of this process are:

- Survey customers first to validate what is most important to them, and specifically, what will most move the needle in terms of their future behaviors, such as their likelihood to continue doing business with you and likelihood to recommend you. Use advanced analytics to identify these drivers and their impact to specific KPIs, and then use those strategic insights to focus what to measure on mystery shops and how to weigh results for optimal impact. As the third largest global market research firm, Ipsos is able to utilize a world-class data science team for this component of the mystery shopping program.
- Re-brand the mystery shopping program. Come up with an on-brand label for the program that conveys the principles behind the effort and link it more completely to the brand promise. This can serve to create 'buzz' and excitement within your organization.
- Conduct "activation workshops" with field management during the design phase and beyond to ensure program buy-in, establish a productive feedback loop and get everyone on the same page with how results will be used, from both tactical and strategic standpoints. Ipsos' clients enlist these in order to collaboratively focus on business improvement efforts.
- Galvanize excitement around the program using rewards to reinforce positive results and desired behaviors. These can be baked into field management and executive incentive plans, "surprise and delight" instant rewards, parties for store staff, or simply formal recognition. You can also recognize and reward engagement with the program, such as implementing training and improvement measures based on program results, or even logging into the online platform on a regular basis.
- Provide tools for the field to both monitor results and understand how to use them. For example, Ipsos provides real-time and mobile device-enabled online dashboard access and activation playbooks for field managers.
- Give access to ensure both corporate and field stakeholders have insights and reports that are timely, relevant and focused, including recommendations for action. Develop an end-to-end cohesive plan for analyzing results, socializing them and translating them to training initiatives and process improvements. Track actions taken and their subsequent outcomes.

- Conduct regular (quarterly) business reviews with senior staff to socialize results, identify key trends, and themes for action for upcoming periods. Ipsos uses these to stay tuned into your business in order to provide the most relevant, topical recommendations.
- Invest in a dedicated activation lead, either within the company or with your mystery shop program provider. As a percentage of the amount many organizations spend on collecting mystery shop data, this investment is very modest, but can be highly impactful. Ipsos clients have found that using an Ipsos activation lead allows them to keep laser focused on implementing value-add continuous improvement plans in their business rather than spending time on program execution and data analysis.

Ipsos' experience is that companies that enlist a comprehensive approach like this get the most value from their programs. For example, a global manufacturer of consumer products that we work with has implemented this approach, including utilizing Ipsos staff as activation leads in working directly with regional operations managers. The program and tools have been embraced by field operations staff who are highly engaged with the results and recommendations, have incorporated findings into staff training and have seen positive results in the key metrics they helped to define. What's more, we have been able to statistically link improvement in key mystery shop metrics with actual sales outcomes, solidifying senior-level buy-in on the ROI.

To find out more, contact....

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About Ipsos

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands, and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. With a strong presence in 90 countries, Ipsos employs more than 20,000 people and conducts research programs in more than 100 countries. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals.

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