



MYSTERY SHOPPING DE-MYSTIFIED

Customer Feedback Plus Mystery
Shopping: A Winning Combination

Authors: Charlene Richey, Wendy Wallner

If you are a restaurant operator or retailer, a primary goal is to provide an exceptional guest experience. Research has proven time and time again that an exceptional guest experience produces better financial results. If you believe in this linkage, you've probably already implemented a Voice of the Customer (VoC) program to monitor and optimize performance. But have you considered adding a mystery shopping program into the mix? Despite common misconceptions that these programs are duplicative, a recent analysis by Ipsos confirms that they provide distinct and valuable insights when used in tandem.

About Mystery Shopping

Mystery shopping, a market research method dating back to the 1940s, initially served to measure employee integrity. Over the years, it has evolved into an effective tool for monitoring customer service, product quality, and compliance. Businesses employ mystery shoppers to act as regular customers and offer detailed feedback about their experiences, thus gaining objective and factual insights into their operations.

The Emergence of VoC Programs

While the practice of mystery shopping has been a long-standing and effective method for businesses to gather objective and tangible insights into their operations, the landscape of customer experience management continuously evolves.

Insights methodologies have broadened, leading to the emergence of VoC programs. These programs, which lean on quantitative data collection and analysis at scale, complement methods like mystery shopping and are a core component of most organizations' CX management programs. They incorporate diverse methods of feedback collection such as CSAT/NPS surveys, interviews through customer intercepts, behavioral data analysis from digital channels, and social media monitoring. With the aid of technology advancements like AI and machine learning, VoC programs can provide real-time performance monitoring and customer sentiment analysis, thus offering robust insights for customer experience management.

The question is: What's the value of including mystery shopping in your customer experience program?



Analysis Overview

To discern whether mystery shopping adds unique value to a VoC program, Ipsos analyzed three data sources from a single restaurant company: VoC survey data, mystery shopping data, and restaurant sales data, all within the same timeframe. The goal was to determine if mystery shopping provides insights beyond those offered by VoC survey data alone.

Dissatisfaction Drivers

The analysis revealed that VoC and mystery shopping data complement each other. The VoC survey pinpointed the primary drivers of dissatisfaction including cleanliness, taste/quality, speed, accuracy, and friendliness, while the mystery shopping further flushed out very granular insights on how to improve. For instance, cleanliness issues were linked to litter along the drive-thru, while taste/quality concerns were associated with lukewarm food delivery, particularly for entrees.

Ultimately, the VoC data uncovered areas of opportunity, and the mystery shopping data complemented it with deeper insight into operational challenges that require resolution, along with visual evidence of these issues.

	VoC Survey (Not Satisfied)	Mystery Shopping
Overall Satisfaction	16% not satisfied, with drive thru least satisfied	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drive-thru, while faster, is rated lower on friendliness, crew appearance
Cleanliness	32% not satisfied	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restroom was unclean, not well stocked or well-maintained• Outside was not clean or well-maintained, with landscaping debris and trash
Taste & Quality	23% not satisfied	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entrée temperature did not meet expectations
Friendliness of Staff	16% not satisfied	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal introductions boosted perceptions of friendliness, but only happened half the time



Sales Drivers

The analysis also explored the correlation between mystery shopping metrics and sales, which can be added to sales lift analysis of other VoC metrics. Our mystery shopping analytics indicated that, contrary to popular belief, it's not all about speed. The three areas measured in mystery shopping generating the most sales when improved by 10% were food quality temperature, server appearance, and cleanliness. Interestingly, these areas might require less investment than working to reduce wait times.

In addition, just the sheer implementation of mystery shopping was shown to have a positive impact on operational performance. Those restaurants that were mystery shopped three or more times per month had 14% greater same store sales results than those that were only shopped twice per month. It just goes to show that "what gets measured, gets done!"



And having a suggestive selling focus is also beneficial for restaurants and retailers when leveraging mystery shopping. In this restaurant example, the restaurants that were seen to consistently upsell during the ordering process had 10% larger average ticket values.





Conclusion

In an ideal scenario, a company would benefit from implementing both VoC and mystery shopping programs. VoC programs provide direct subjective, scaled, customer feedback with a focus on understanding sentiment and perceptions, and mystery shopping programs provide an objective, black and white, audit-like assessment of the operational delivery of CX promises.

Together, they offer a comprehensive, multi-dimensional understanding of the customer journey at a granular level, aiding consistent improvement in customer experience and financial performance at the location level.

Authors:

Charlene Richey,

SVP Channel Performance, Ipsos

Charlene.Richey@ipsos.com

Wendy Wallner

EVP Client Officer, Retail & Restaurants, Ipsos

Wendy.Wallner@ipsos.com

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