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## **MYSTERY SHOPPING AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL OF IMPROVING A SERVICE**

### *What is Mystery Shopping?*

Mystery shopping might be something you've heard of before, and perhaps you know a bit about it. Mystery shopping involves a professional who anonymously visits your business as a customer. This professional analyses the performance of your employees as well as the facility, and the analysis is all based on your custom criteria.

Mystery shopping is an instrument used by market research companies to measure quality of retail service or gather specific information about products and service. Mystery shoppers posing as normal customers perform specific tasks—such as purchasing a product, asking questions, registering complaints or behaving in a certain way – and then provide detailed reports or feedback about their experiences.

Tools used for mystery shopping assessments range from simple questionnaires to complete audio and video recordings. Many mystery shopping companies are completely administered through the Internet, allowing potential mystery shoppers to use the Internet to register for participation, find mystery shopping jobs and receive payment.

### *History of Mystery Shopping*

Mystery shopping began in the 1940s in the USA as a way to measure employee integrity. Managers of retail stores wanted to learn if their employees gave cheques after sales or fixed the prices according to official recommendations.

The second wave of mystery shopping was spread in the 1970s in the USA and Europe. Such compound electronic goods as TV-sets, music centers, compact receivers, electronic musical instruments etc. appeared in that time and there were the problems for sellers to present goods and advise the customers. That's why the manufacturers (Sony, Philips, Panasonic and Bose) used the mystery shopper to appraise the level of personnel's knowledge. According to the results managers decided who needs more information about goods. Mystery shoppers helped the companies to improve the technical skills of their sellers. The first special agencies

of mystery shopping appeared in that time.

Now the world market of mystery shopping's service is about 2 bn dollars. There are more than one million mystery shoppers in the USA. This service is provided by more than 500 special agencies. Region associations of Mystery Shopping providers operate in Europe, Latin America, Asia and the USA. For example there is Europe Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA Europe), North America Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA North America).

*When does your company need Mystery Shopping?*

- the results of sellers' activity are unconsoling;
- goods are sold badly;
- competitors sell more;
- buyers leave the shop without purchases;
- customers do not use additional service;
- there is a suspicion that the employees are not diligent enough.

*How can Mystery Shopping help your company?*

- it can apprise the service provided by your company's sellers, their strong and weak sides;
- inspect professional skills of the staff, their knowledge about products or services, relationships with customers;
- appraise the loyalty and integrity to your company;
- control how the staff follows the company's standards;
- correct the training programme for the personnel;
- stimulate sales.

The target of Mystery Shopping is helping the company to operate its services on the outlets. Mystery Shopping gives an opportunity to see and appraise the work of the staff by eyes of real consumers. This marketing tool helps to improve the sellers' service as well as make it more attractive for the clients. Mystery Shopping favours the increase of the number of the loyal customers, levels of sales, profit and all business.

*Mystery Shopping in Ukraine*

The first Ukrainian Mystery Shopping company is 4Service. It was founded in 2001 for securing information to the companies about the service provided by their personnel. 4Service also gives advises about improving of service, creates service standards.

So Mystery Shopping is an effective tool of the controlling, inspecting and improving your company's service. Inculcation of Mystery Shopping secures the competitor service advantage and makes clients loyal.