

Use of Control Tools in Mystery Shopping

It has been said many times that interacting with other people is one of the most challenging things we come across throughout our professional lives. People are a set of individuals, each of whom has different wants, approaches, priorities, and understanding of things. Managing the differences requires two way communication, thorough coordination and adequate control of procedures.

Handling the human factor is especially crucial in Mystery Shopping. The quality of a projects' output is highly reliant on the performance of individual shoppers. This matter places high pressure on Mystery Shopping companies. Client companies associate shopper performance with the given company's competence. To make things worse, they have a point.

You may be the best intentioned shopper company in the world with lots of dedication and highly professional analytical skills., but if you cannot ensure the work quality of shoppers, your projects can easily turn into chaos. Moreover, this is likely to cause inconvenience on the client side as well.

So what is the right procedure to bridge the gap? Using controlling tools, which embrace the operation. Generally there are three phases of the field work:

- o **R**ecruiting and selecting shoppers
- o **I**mplementing shopper preparation
- o **S**ore visits by shoppers

The above phases are fundamental components of the basic minimum. This means that none of them can be avoided or ignored.

With a little luck one can implement a relatively solid project using the three stages only. LUCK????!!! – Yes, luck.

Obviously, we don't want to rely on luck at all in our professional lives. Rather we like to make sure that everything is in place.

Making sure can be achieved by completing the above model with:

- o **E**mploying controlling tools

Employing controlling tools is like completing the puzzle. It helps Mystery Shopping companies to implement projects more successfully, through the exclusion of anomalies.

As the initials suggest, deployment of controlling tools will help your company

R I S E

The controlling tools which Mystery Shopping companies use can vary on a wide scale. This article suggests a trinity of tools that cover the whole field operation.



Front-end Controlling

This effort aims at making sure that the shoppers are well prepared and ready for the assignment. A powerful way of doing so is applying controlling questions. There are two relevant phases:

Firstly, shoppers shall be made aware that their knowledge on the assignment will be tested by control questions. Awareness of a forthcoming test has a psychological effect on shoppers, which results in more thorough preparation. In other words, shoppers tend to study the brief material more carefully.

Secondly, the control questions shall be filed to each shopper prior to deployment. This will outline the level of readiness and identify weak spots. Moreover, it is an opportunity to rehearse the key points of the assignment with those who need more preparation. Shoppers who cannot answer the control questions shall be given another day (N.B. Timing must allow enough room for a second round of questions) to prepare and new questions are to be asked. This can be repeated three times. By the third time an average of 99% will know the right answers. Now, this may seem like lots of hassle, but it actually reduces editing time and in-report errors dramatically.

In-Report Controlling

Control questions can be put in the reports as well. Bad shoppers may try to submit reports filled without actually making an onsite visit. Knowing that certain questions can only be answered in the report if the visit is made will prevent even bad shoppers from having ideas. Such questions also prove to the client that the visit has been made. Examples: External and internal description of the site, Name and description of the shopped person...etc.

Back-end Controlling

Back-end controlling means checking the consistency and completeness of all submitted reports before forwarding to clients. Inconsistencies, errors, and

incomplete fields can be corrected by editing (much less than usual thanks to the Front-end tool). Shoppers are to be contacted via phone to answer the emerging questions. This will guarantee the integrity of reports.

All in all, adequate controlling techniques reduce the risk of Mystery Shopping anomalies to occur. It is especially effective in excluding the following anomalies:

- Shopper Spotting
- Improper imitation of shopping situation
- Inconsistency and controversy in reports
- Incomplete reports (missing information)
- Shopper visits not actually made

This means being able to guarantee a 100% solid field operation. A solid operation provides the following goodies: working with shoppers more effectively, saving a lot of the editing time, increased usefulness and accuracy of collected data, client appreciation and higher loyalty. Putting all that together has one inevitable effect: Your Company will

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