



# Mystery Shoppers

customer service specialists

## Update Issue 1

### Welcome

Welcome to the first of a series of updates giving an overview of the latest products, news and industry trends. In this update we also cover how to ensure your mystery shopping programme retains credibility by avoiding features which enable the shoppers to be spotted.

### Quality video now at affordable prices

Video mystery shopping is rapidly increasing in popularity as companies seek to ensure that every customer interaction is as positive as possible and that no potential sales are lost. Retailers in particular are finding that video eliminates at a stroke any objections or challenges from branch managers and staff.

Over the last 18 months, Mystery Shoppers Ltd has developed a professional team of covert agents who can cover all corners of the UK and Ireland. Their experiences are captured using state of the art recording equipment and uploaded to our secure inbound data website within hours of the visit being completed.

As a result, we have been able to halve the fee per video visit we were quoting just a year ago.

Video mystery shoppers often accompany genuine customers who have been recruited in order to record their experience.

The videos themselves can either be supplied on DVD or downloaded through our password-protected secure website in a variety of formats.

For an example of the quality we can offer please visit [www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk/videoMS](http://www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk/videoMS)



### Features in this issue:

- Programmes for smaller businesses
- Best year yet!
- New web reporting facility
- Housing Association Benchmark Scheme
- Mystery Shoppers are the Busy Bees' knees
- Keeping the mystery in mystery shopping



### New website launch

August saw the launch of our new website which has been re-designed and re-branded with a vibrant new look.

Clients can now access their own web reports via the Client Area.

Mystery shoppers can amend their records and take the new Mystery Shopper Basic Skills course which results in Certificated Shopper status for those who pass the test.

Check it out at [www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk](http://www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk).

## Mystery Shopping accessible for smaller businesses

In the past our mystery shopping programmes have been designed specifically for each client, therefore costing more money to cover design and set-up. We now have programmes specifically tailored to a number of industry sectors as well as a generic customer service assessment which uses a free-format approach.



This new style does not involve a set up fee or a minimum quantity of visits or calls which makes it a much more flexible and economical option, especially for small businesses.

To find out more about the programme, please phone Sarah Phipps on 01409 298216 or visit [www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk/industry\\_specific\\_programmes](http://www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk/industry_specific_programmes)

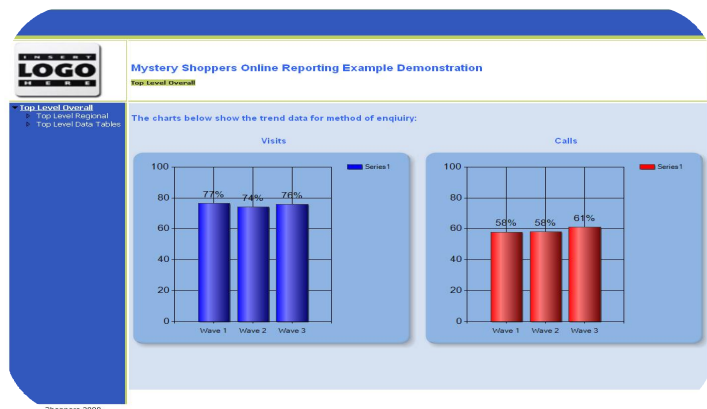
## Best year yet!

Mystery Shoppers had cause for celebration when it was announced that turnover for the financial year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 was over £900,000. This was the second year in succession that the company had achieved an incredible 30% rate of growth.

Paul Grafton, Managing Director said "We are thrilled with these results which show just how well our products, our quality and our methodology are meeting market requirements. While some clients have reduced or postponed their programmes due to the recession we are still dealing with a stream of hot enquiries and regularly find ourselves bidding against the biggest players in the mystery shopping sector.

Paul concluded, In these tough economic times when companies are tightening their belts we continue to reduce our costs and invest in new technology and products so we can offer our clients the very best combination of quality and value."

## New web-based reporting facility



Mystery Shoppers have launched a new secure data website giving clients access to all their individual assessments showing which have been completed.

Some clients prefer assessments to be uploaded as soon as they are quality checked. Other clients require them to be made available at the end of each wave in order to avoid alerting managers as to when an assessment is due/complete. This keeps them on their toes as they can never be sure if an assessment has taken place in a particular week.

The secure online data summary enables authorised users to drill down from corporate results, department results and individual assessments. They can select data by wave, time period and sub-unit group (such as Branch, Region, Area, Department, Directorate, Business Manager, Retail Manager and Business Unit).

For an example of the facility, please visit [www.mystery-shoppers](http://www.mystery-shoppers) and select the 'Clients' Area'.

## Housing Association Benchmarking Scheme

Our benchmark programme allows Housing Associations not only to run a mystery shopping programme free of set-up costs but also to see how their scores compare with others in the programme.

Housing Associations can run their programme at any time to suit their own requirements and their results are compared with the average scores for the other participants.

The programme is structured to require minimal effort on the part of the client and their staff and costs from £498 per Wave.

The basic package includes:

- A set of 10 mystery calls, 3 emails, 3 letters and 3 visits
- The option to select a sample set to suit your own needs
- Individual assessment reports for each call, visit, email and letter
- A Benchmark Report showing your detailed results compared with the Benchmark Rolling Average for all participating Housing Associations and with the highest scores achieved for each communication channel
- The option to add as many extras as you need to meet your own circumstances
- The option to receive call recordings and copies of the actual emails and letters sent and received
- The option of a more detailed individual report including trend analysis using any previous results as well as benchmark data.

For further information, please visit [www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk](http://www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk) and click on the Housing Associations link at the bottom of the page.

## Mystery Shoppers are the Busy Bees' knees



Busy Bees, one of the UK's largest providers of children's day care nurseries, recently used mystery shopping services to ensure the high standards set for their nurseries are maintained.

Busy Bees wanted their mystery shopping programme to track the customer journey from initial enquiry to inspection visit, and then follow up call, with the results of the exercise forming part of a continuous improvement programme.

Prior to the mystery shopping exercise, records showed that 50% of enquiries resulted in an inspection visit with 80% of these resulting in a booked nursery place. Cheryl Evans, Busy Bees Regional Operations Director said "We are very pleased with the work that Mystery Shoppers have carried out for us, the results provide valuable insight. We will share the findings amongst our nursery staff to implement changes to any issues highlighted. We pride ourselves on our child centred approach, and we use the programme to ensure the standard parents expect from our nurseries are as high as they can be."

The programme started in October 2008 by assessing 20 nurseries across the UK. After the first set of results Busy Bees expanded their sample size to include more locations.

Busy Bees offer more than 11,500 nursery places to children in 131 locations nationwide, and receive enquiries from interested parents by phone, email and by simply dropping in.

# Keeping the Mystery in Mystery Shopping

By Paul Grafton, Managing Director



It is amazing how often prospective clients tell us how easily their staff spotted mystery shoppers in their previous programme. We often get claims that staff can spot our mystery shoppers, but when we ask for date and time it's invariably not us.

We hear of two specific circumstances which seem to be fairly common and which will inevitably lead to mystery shoppers being spotted.

The first circumstance is when the same scenario is used across multiple branches. Sometimes the give-away is that the scenario stands out as untypical, but just as often it seems that the problem arises from having branches receive their reports within a short time of the assessment being carried out.

Once the first branch gets their assessment they will often contact all other branches to tell them the scenario and (often using the CCTV footage) a description of the mystery shopper.

We always insist on a realistic scenario, and advise strongly against immediate reporting if it's likely to compromise the integrity of the programme.

The second main circumstance is when a programme with a high frequency is carried out by an agency which has only a limited number of mystery shoppers. Some clients insist on mystery shoppers being employees rather than self-employed, or that they be formally trained. While the intention is clearly to maximise quality, our experience is that it isn't a major factor. But it does make it inevitable that there will only be a few mystery shoppers in any particular area, and when the same mystery shopper carries out repeated assessments of the same location they will quickly get spotted.

We have developed a standard methodology which uses a combination of assessment form design and quality checking to give a high level of consistency without the need for face-to-face agent training. For many programmes we need mystery

shoppers to represent ordinary members of the public, so detailed training about the client would be inappropriate. For programmes which are out of the ordinary we use a web-based briefing on which the mystery shopper is tested to ensure they have fully absorbed the brief. Only those who pass the test are given assignments.

When allocating an assignment we first check the availability and suitability of our core group of several hundred experienced mystery shoppers. If we don't have any in the area who match the required profile then we look on our wider database for mystery shoppers who are certified. These are agents that have successfully passed our web-based training programme. Sometimes these will already have a lot of mystery shopping experience with other agencies but not with us. Sometimes they will be inexperienced – in which case we use the web brief and test facility and make sure we give them their assignment early enough to be able to have it re-done if it doesn't pass our quality checks.

Using this method we can ensure consistent high quality while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls resulting from having to use the same mystery shoppers again and again at the same sites.

## Mystery Shoppers Ltd

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Mystery Shoppers Ltd is a Company Partner of the MRS and a member of the MSPA.

If you would like to comment on any of the issues discussed in this edition or would like to contribute to one of our future editions, please contact Holli Black, Sales and Marketing Co-ordinator on 01409 298217 or email [holli.black@mystery-shoppers.co.uk](mailto:holli.black@mystery-shoppers.co.uk).

For further information please visit [www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk](http://www.mystery-shoppers.co.uk).

