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"MYSTERY SHOPPING" TECHNOLOGY

"Mystery shopping" is a research method that is used as part of marketing research aimed at evaluating consumer experience gained by the client in purchasing goods or services, and to solve organizational problems , such as determining the level of compliance with the standards of customer service by the organization staff and so on.

Mystery Shopping singled out as an independent field of research in the United States in the 1940s. Use of this methodology primarily concerned employees' honesty checking. Within the program retailing management found out whether salespeople gave out checks during purchase, whether prices of goods conformed with the established ones, whether salespeople shortweighted customers etc.

Development of Mystery Shopping in its present form concurred with the development of the Internet in western countries, especially the United States. Large network companies such as Wall-mart, Citibank, MacDonald's, Shell have received the opportunity to obtain current information about customer servicing at every branch, store, restaurant or gas station and via the Internet at reasonable prices. This information is collected for them by a great number of "Mystery shoppers" who work in specialized Mystery Shopping agencies. There are about 500 agencies in the U.S. now.

Mystery Shopping technology consists in assessment of the quality of service by trained people who visit retail outlets as ordinary customers. Before starting every "mystery shopper" undergoes special training - studies the specific character of the project he intends to participate in. The results of his observations are recorded in a special form (questionnaire), pointing out fulfillment or non-fulfillment of certain service standards. Sometimes a "mystery shopper" uses hidden audio or video recording.

"Secret shoppers" assess: fulfillment or non-fulfillment of certain service standards, compliance with sales techniques, personnel competence, visual design and clean location, layout of pos- materials, work of cash desk, special event promotion.

Mystery Shopping is used to control the staff, stimulate important personnel actions (active sales etc.), give incentives to best employees / best practices ; motivate (KPI system), train the personnel focusing on identified drawbacks, study competitors and for strategic analysis and identifying areas for investment.

When used properly, the long-term Mystery Shopping program leads to the following results in the retailing network: increase of the buyers - visitors ratio, increase of an average check, increase of sales of additional products / services, increase of sales per unit of trade personnel, increase of resale (behavioral loyalty) , improvement of financial performance , increase of profits.

The main customers of Mystery Shopping in Ukraine are large companies that have a large number of retail outlets or lots of staff. Manufacturers and product suppliers that control the distribution of products through partner retailers can also be clients of the program. In developed western countries the services of the Mystery Shopping program are actively used by public authorities, tax authorities , in the sphere of health care , public transportation etc.