

Measuring and Improving the In-Store Experience with Mystery Shopping

The Ultimate Guide for the Fashion Retail Industry

The fashion retail landscape has undergone significant changes, with e-commerce and online fast fashion rapidly gaining ground. Online shopping offers convenience, competitive pricing, and a wide selection, making it a powerful force in the industry.

However, brick-and-mortar stores still hold an irreplaceable advantage: they provide a shopping experience that the Internet simply cannot replicate.

Shoppers visit physical stores not just to buy clothing but to engage with the products, try them on and seek personalized service. The opportunity to interact with well-informed staff, receive styling advice, and experience the look, feel, and fit of clothing before purchasing are essential elements that set in-store shopping apart from the online alternative.

This “try-before-you-buy” experience, along with the immediate satisfaction of taking purchases home, gives fashion retailers a distinct edge—if they can fully capitalize on it.



Mystery Shopping: A Key to Measuring the In-Store Experience

Mystery shopping is a tool for fashion retailers looking to evaluate how well their in-store experience aligns with customer expectations. By using trained mystery shoppers to pose as everyday customers, retailers can gain objective insights into critical aspects of the shopping experience that matter most to their target audience.

Through mystery shopping, retailers can measure the effectiveness of personalized service, the quality of interactions at the fitting rooms, and even the ambiance that makes customers feel welcomed and valued.

With the ability to assess real customer experiences, mystery shopping allows fashion retailers to fine-tune their operations, ensuring that each visit to the store is memorable for the right reasons.

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What Can Mystery Shoppers Evaluate?

Mystery shopping provides a comprehensive evaluation of the entire in-store experience, allowing retailers to see through the eyes of their customers. Here are some of the critical metrics that mystery shoppers can evaluate:

Greeting

This metric helps you understand whether your employees are making customers feel welcome from the moment they enter your store. Mystery shoppers assess whether employees greet customers warmly and offer assistance. They will also report on how quickly the employees greeted them and what they said. What happens when no one greets customers entering the store? Mystery shoppers can observe what staff members are doing instead—are they engaged in tasks, helping another customer, or simply ignoring customers?

Store Ambiance & Cleanliness

A store's ambiance and appearance can make a lasting impression. Mystery shoppers evaluate the overall cleanliness, lighting, music, and general atmosphere of your store. Is the environment inviting and aligned with your brand's identity? Are product displays organized and visually appealing? With mystery shopping, you can find out!

Product Knowledge & Recommendations

Knowledgeable employees are a significant asset in a retail setting. Mystery shoppers test how well staff can answer product questions and make personalized recommendations. Are your employees able to suggest items based on customer needs or provide insights into product features and benefits? This evaluation reveals whether your staff can elevate the shopping experience.

Stock Availability

Product availability is an often-overlooked aspect of the in-store experience. Mystery shoppers can assess whether your store is well-stocked with a range of sizes and styles. Are customers able to find the products they're looking for, or do they frequently encounter out-of-stock items? This evaluation helps identify issues in inventory management that could lead to customer dissatisfaction.



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Fitting Room

The fitting room experience can determine whether a customer makes a purchase, and mystery shoppers provide crucial feedback on how well this area is managed. Mystery shoppers assess not only the cleanliness of fitting rooms but also how quickly and attentively employees manage them. Do employees check in to see if customers need different sizes or additional items?

Improve Loss Prevention with Mystery Shopping

Fitting rooms are often hotspots for theft, making proper monitoring crucial for effective loss prevention. Mystery shopping provides insights into how well your employees supervise this area. Are employees tracking the number of items customers bring in? Are they present when customers exit the fitting room? Is the fitting room checked for left-behind items before the next customer enters? Proper fitting room monitoring not only safeguards your inventory but also acts as a strong deterrent to shoplifting.

Upselling & Promotions

Effective upselling can increase a store's revenue. With mystery shopping, you can evaluate how well your employees engage in suggestive selling techniques. Are they promoting complementary products or offering deals on items that pair well with a customer's selection? The mystery shoppers will also assess how well in-store promotions are communicated, helping you understand if your team is maximizing every opportunity to boost sales.

Loyalty & Marketing Program Promotion

Mystery shoppers assess whether your staff informs customers about loyalty programs or other marketing initiatives. Are they explaining the benefits clearly and encouraging sign-ups? This helps ensure you are making the most of every opportunity to engage customers and build long-term relationships.

Checkout

Mystery shoppers can evaluate how efficiently the checkout process is handled. Are there long lines? Is the payment process smooth and seamless? Are staff members friendly and engaging at this stage, or do they rush through the transaction? The checkout process often leaves a lasting impression on customers, and evaluating it ensures that it aligns with the overall customer experience you want to provide.

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Gain Even More Insights with Detailed Narratives

Mystery shoppers provide more than just data—they offer a complete narrative of their in-store experience. These firsthand accounts offer rich, qualitative insights that reveal the nuances of customer interactions, service quality, and store ambiance. By reading the narrative, you gain a deeper understanding of how each part of the shopping journey unfolds. This allows you to pinpoint specific areas for improvement and celebrate what your team is doing well.

Here's an example of a fitting room experience from a mystery shopper's report:

"When I approached the fitting room area, I noticed there was no staff member immediately visible. After a short wait, an associate came by and politely asked how many items I had. She did not offer any assistance. The fitting room itself was clean, but it took a few minutes before someone checked in to see if I needed a different size. When I left the fitting room, there was no one at the desk, so I simply returned the items to the rack myself."

Leverage Visual Proof to See What's Happening in the Store

When mystery shoppers take discreet photos during their visit and submit them alongside their report, they provide retailers with visual evidence that complements the written report. These photos can offer insights into the condition of the fitting rooms or problem areas like a disorganized product display. Visual documentation allows you to see firsthand whether your store's layout, cleanliness, and product presentation are up to the standards you expect.

However, to maintain discretion and avoid drawing attention, mystery shoppers should take a limited number of photos inside the store. This careful balance ensures that they remain incognito while still providing useful visual proof.

With mystery shopping, you will gain actionable insights into your in-store experience, helping you make the most of what online platforms cannot offer.

Let's explore how our expertise can benefit your business.



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