

## Mystery Shoppers

Every business, large and small, wants to develop successfully. The first thing they need to know is whether the products and services they provide are satisfactory, desirable, or even a customer's favourite, or whether they are simply available and will be abandoned as soon as a better alternative appears. Surveys and questionnaires are usually only completed by the most enthusiastic or angriest customers, so what do businesses do?

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To answer this question, many service companies and retailers employ "mystery shoppers". These consultants pretend to be real customers and use the services or buy the retailer's products, then report their experiences accordingly. Mystery shoppers are from all walks of life, so their assessments are quite systematic. The idea first appeared in the 1970s in the United States and has grown rapidly since then; it is a market research tool from which almost any company can benefit.

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Employers also rely on reports from mystery shoppers to assess the honesty, efficiency, courtesy, and attitude of their staff, uncovering deficiencies in expertise to provide suggestions for improvement. They also evaluate the effectiveness of a company's advertising programs, promotions, and media activities, and even investigate competitors to identify weaknesses – and strengths.

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What do mystery shoppers do?

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When were mystery shoppers first used?

Why would companies employ mystery shoppers?