



Great service and good value

Or is it? – Mystery shopping and your business

You operate what you perceive is an efficient business, with friendly and helpful staff, providing a top quality product, always on schedule, and with little or no complaint from your clientele.

How do you know?

Do your customers actually inform you, or do you assume, perhaps mistakenly, that as you receive few complaints, most are satisfied?

In reality, it is a difficult task to find out exactly what your customers think of your business. The British tradition tends to prevent the customer, under pain of acute embarrassment, from expressing dissatisfaction with a purchase, product or service, which fails to match up to their expectation.

Unfortunately, with the exception of the purchase of completely faulty merchandise, the

Great British Public can often be relied upon never to murmur a word of dissent. They depart with a polite nod and a smile, and should the success of the business be attributed to a healthy passing trade, the owner will never know!

People may not tell the owner, but they will certainly tell their friends and relatives - in fact research has shown that a complaint will be relayed to between eight and twelve other people!

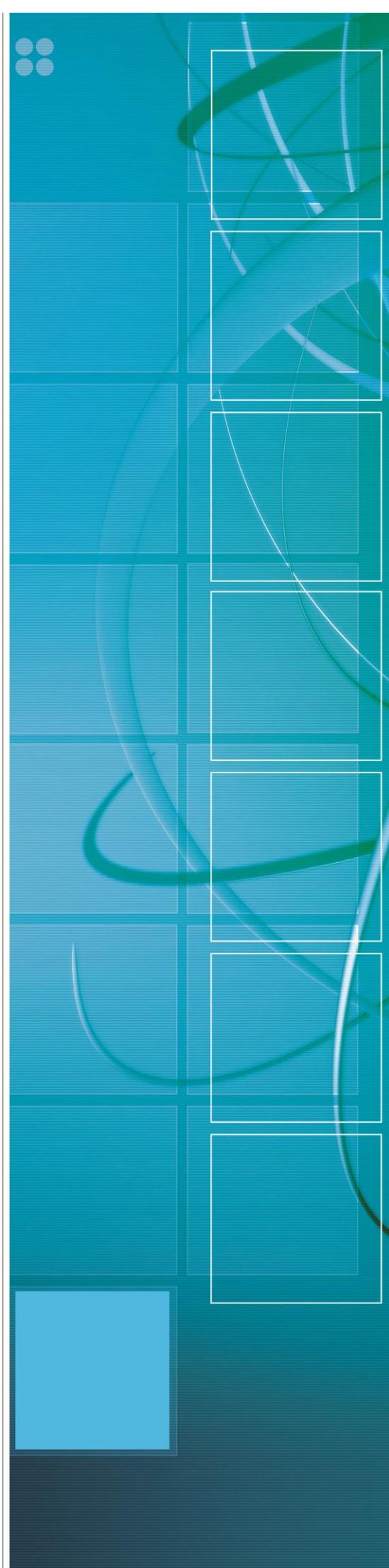
However, most business people, by virtue of their need to remain in business, **do** care what the customer thinks. Some businesses, in particular restaurants and hotels, attempt to address the 'problem' of identifying what customers think or desire by offering a self-completion 'satisfaction' questionnaire.

Sadly, the fickle nature of the person enjoying leisure activity means that filling in one of these cards will be a low priority. The proprietor of the establishment will sometimes erroneously take the view that not having received many suggestions or report cards back indicates customers are satisfied!

So you own one of the finest premises in the region, your prices are noted for their competitiveness and all staff have been trained by experts in their relevant fields.

Yet your sales graph is completely depressing!

Have you simply forgotten to bear in mind what the customer really expects? Are customers not telling you outright, or do you perhaps not know what they want? Or, because they don't like to complain, is the customer exercising their freedom of choice by simply going elsewhere?





That's where 'Mystery Shopping' can help identify your customer contact weaknesses.

And what is mystery shopping?

As buying patterns become increasingly sophisticated, people are no longer buying simply on price.

Mystery shopping is a recent technique which conveys the increasing influence and importance of service over price in the purchasing processes of the 1990's consumer. Mystery shopping is where an independent panel of 'shoppers' visit your premises as anonymous 'customers' to purchase your goods or services and monitor how your staff react both operationally and personally. Your staff don't know it's happening, while the mystery shopper is fully briefed to evaluate a detailed series of criteria specific to your business following their visit.

It must be stressed however that mystery shopping is not just a method for checking how staff perform in your absence. It analyses how well your training has been implemented and it assesses the individual's response to the closing of a sale, be it a car, a suit or a bag of takeaway chips!

For example, how many times have you seen or heard of the car salesman who despite being as honest as the day is long, doesn't consult with the man's wife on what is ostensibly the family's second most expensive investment outside the purchase of their home. Or he unwittingly ignores the children as a member of the 'children should be seen and not heard' brigade.

In racing to close the sale, he fails to realise that the moment the family steps out of that showroom, the wife will most certainly say 'We're not buying the car there - he never even asked me if I might like to drive it'. The salesman also fails to realise the influential part wives play in the modern family's purchasing decisions.

And by appearing not to show care and concern for the family as a unit, the salesperson will probably lose the sale. All completely involuntarily.

People will talk. It's human nature.

They once said careless talk costs lives. Well, talk **about** carelessness can cost **you** business.

Carelessness and lack of attention to detail in your business is what people will remember and talk about most about to their friends.

Mystery shopping, as an integral element of your sales effort, can make the difference between your business being good and your business being great.

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