

# Mystery Shopping

## Strategy behind increasing a restaurant's topline and bottomline

by Kapil Malhotra

**T**here is fierce competition for businesses in today's economic climate. The success of any business is determined by the satisfaction and loyalty of its customers. The quality of customer service is often more important to a customer than many other features of a product, even the price. Many profitable firms effectively rely on their reputation for good customer service to sustain a price differential over their competitors.

Mystery shopping programs can be utilized to provide an invaluable insight into a company's employees' customer service and sales skills. With the aid of mystery shopping evaluation, sales techniques can be enhanced which can directly impact the purchase decisions of customers and boost sales. It is possible to predict that as standards of living rise, better quality and service will become more important relative to price.

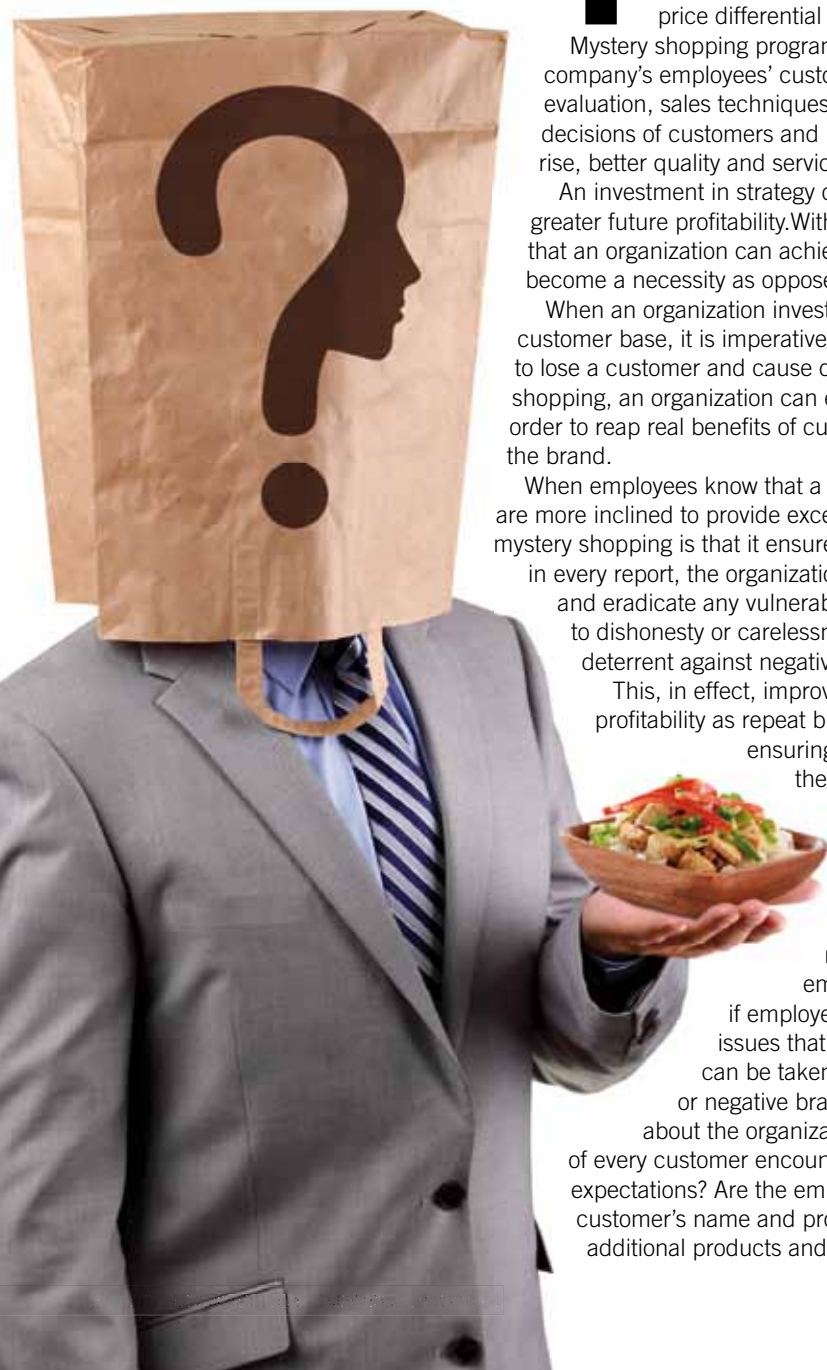
An investment in strategy of quality customer service now is therefore an investment in greater future profitability. With the significant service improvements and revenue increases that an organization can achieve by properly utilizing mystery shopping programs, it has become a necessity as opposed to a luxury.

When an organization invests substantial time and effort in creating a loyal and trusting customer base, it is imperative to maintain that customer pool. It takes one bad experience to lose a customer and cause damage to the brand image. Fortified with the power of mystery shopping, an organization can ensure that every customer experience is of highest quality in order to reap real benefits of customer loyalty, business growth and immeasurable success for the brand.

When employees know that a mystery shopper can visit their store at any given time they are more inclined to provide excellent customer service to every customer. Another benefit of mystery shopping is that it ensures employee integrity. With the internal control observations in every report, the organization can take appropriate steps to strengthen its employee pool and eradicate any vulnerability. This will ensure that there is no loss to the top line due to dishonesty or carelessness from the employees. Mystery shopping is an effective deterrent against negative behavior that affects brand image and profitability.

This, in effect, improves overall customer service, which, in turn, leads to increased profitability as repeat business is the key profit-maker. Repeat business comes from ensuring that customers are genuinely and completely satisfied with the quality of the service that they receive. Repeat sales save unnecessary expenditure on advertising and promotion costs related to attracting new customers.

Mystery shopping is one of the foundational methods retailers rely on today to gather vital information on the day-to-day operations at individual outlets. It is impossible for top management to be in every outlet to review the service of each employee. In this, every industry it is of vital importance to know if employees are building a rapport with the customer. There are many issues that plague the management of organizations including what steps can be taken to ensure that fewer customers leave the outlet with a neutral or negative brand image. Are the employees correctly informing customers about the organization's products and services? Are employees taking advantage of every customer encounter to convert it into a 'WOW' experience and exceed customer expectations? Are the employees engaging in qualitative friendly interaction using the customer's name and proactively communicating the benefits and recommending additional products and services? Which retail outlets are under-performing? What





exactly is the competition offering that they are not. All of these pointers need to be evaluated and addressed appropriately. With the help of Mystery Shopping evaluations, managers can have access to valuable concrete, quantified, unbiased information to help them make better decisions.

The versatility of mystery shopping as a highly customizable survey system has made it a go-to solution for retailers to check the pulse of their service to customers in every department. Mystery shopping programs can be instituted for a variety of different reasons, with each program specifically targeted to produce benefits in the most critical areas. The information derived from a consistent mystery shopping program can be effectively used as a catalyst to market products with an improved approach and focus resources to enhance staff skills and techniques for better sales.

Mystery shopping helps in identifying specific training needs within the employee pool, and helps in measuring the effectiveness of employee training. Mystery shopping supports an incentive program that boosts employee productivity and loyalty. The evaluations provided in the reports to the management can be reviewed to incentivize star performers, motivate average employees and plan training and counseling for employees whose skills fall below the average index.

Another growing trend has been ensuring food safety within the food service industry with new rules and regulations being established by India's food safety and security commission. Through our ties with FSSAI and NRAI, TSI has become a leader in evaluating food service quality and safety. Our customized auditing model checks all F&B industry-specific quality assurance standards and can be tailored to fit any size outlet. This is vital to create accountability and keep staff incentivized to consistently perform at a high level and in the safest way possible to protect the customer.

Our confidential Food Safety Inspection Program assists the organization to drill down to root causes of violations and food safety problems. It is a comprehensive and independent review of food service operations that helps to ensure that the organization is meeting customer expectations for service, quality, food safety and atmosphere, as well as all applicable laws and regulations. Regular inspections are a proactive way to eliminate customer complaint and food illness attacks. We are able to certify brand outlets that meet all laws and regulations as compliant.

With mystery shopping solutions, clients can reach to the next level in customer retention, industry best practices, highest employee integrity, highest quality services, and delivering direct insight to the upper management that is unachievable elsewhere. ●●

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