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**“Taking the Mystery Out of Mystery Shopping:
Five More Pitfalls You Can Avoid”**
by Deanna Turner

As you look forward to your 2003 strategic goals a new mystery shopping program may be an important component of your plan. Last month you read about five common mistakes banks make with mystery shops. Following are five additional pitfalls that you can avoid to save time, energy and money:

1) Don't rob Peter to pay Paul. It is difficult for shoppers to smoothly complete two different transactions with two different bank employees...without suspicion. Therefore, according to Bob Seiler of SG Marketing Group, it is often better to split the transactions rather than attempt to complete two in the same shop. This is clearer for shoppers and will yield better information. Be cautioned it will cost more as you'll be using two shoppers instead of one.

It is also important to vary your scenarios with both tellers and sales. For example, don't do cashing a non-bank check and asking to open a new account repeatedly. Keep it fresh for shoppers and score a variety of transactions; home equity loans, CD's, money markets, car loans, home equity loans, etc.

2) The questionnaire is your deliverable product. Mystique Shopper president, John Saccheri, emphasizes the importance of a well thought out survey. All surveys have yes/no questions, however it is critical to have immediate room for the shopper to explain.

“Did the teller offer a friendly greeting?” “No” as an answer without room for elaboration will make it impossible for managers to give good feedback and effective coaching. Don't assume that you will get all the specifics in one long narrative at the end of the questionnaire!

3) Organize and use the data with an online reporting system. While managers review shop results with employees, Saccheri also recommends a “Survey Summary”. Over a period of time a survey summary will consistently spot feedback trends, specific areas of improvement, regional discrepancies, etc. This will help management target their change efforts.

4) Have one central person in charge. Be sure to allocate the proper resources to administer the program internally. Ideally the contact person has the influence to garner top management support and buy-in from the field. Additionally, they should have input to incentive compensation and KPI's for scores, deposit retention, new deposits, etc. to be certain your bank is achieving its goals.

5) Hire a business partner not just a vendor. As with any intervention, this should be an evolution of continuous improvement not a "one time" event. Work with an experienced professional who clearly understands your strategic objectives and is committed to helping you achieve bottom line results.

Of course these two articles only scratch the surface of measurement and implementation of continuous improvement. However, as you consider your 2003 business goals, these ten key points will help you accelerate your mystery shopping efforts.

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