

Reset and Revive:

A Comprehensive Guide to Relaunching Your Mystery Shopping Program for CX Excellence



Introduction

The 2020s have been challenging for grocers. From pandemic upheaval to high inflationary pressures and tight labor markets, we know that many grocers have had to compromise programs, cut operational initiatives, and reduce budgets.

Returning to business as usual continues to be a challenging journey, and many programs have yet to be restarted. However, did you know that mystery shopping can be crucial to your business?

A mystery shopping program is a powerful market research tool to measure and improve your customer experience. After all, happy customers are the basic building block for any business. Stopping mystery shopping programs has left many grocers falling behind their competition because they lack key operational and CX data needed to help keep customers happy and satisfied, **so they come back.**



Why is mystery shopping data important for today's grocers?

Companies that use mystery shopping see an **average growth of over 10%**¹

61% of customers have switched brands due to poor customer service²

32% of all customers would stop doing business with a brand they loved after **one bad experience**³

90% of Americans use customer service as a factor in deciding whether or not to do business with a company⁴



¹ MSPA

² Microsoft - <https://cloudblogs.microsoft.com/dynamics365/bdm/2018/08/30/now-available-the-2018-state-of-global-customer-service-report/>

³ PwCt - <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/future-of-customer-experience.html>

⁴ American Express - <https://www.business2community.com/customer-experience/personalization-and-customer-experience-strategies-for-success-02330244>

Why should you restart your mystery shopping program?

Mystery shopping is a strategic tool that sends anonymous shoppers into grocery stores to evaluate a wide range of customer experience aspects. These can include the store's cleanliness, the staff's friendliness and helpfulness, the wait times at checkout, the availability and freshness of products, and many other crucial factors that contribute to a customer's overall experience. This process allows grocers to obtain critical insights into the customer journey within their stores, pinpointing areas that excel and identifying opportunities for enhancement.

With the added pressure of new grocery entrants, like convenience stores, discount retailers, and large e-commerce brands, staying ahead in the highly competitive grocery sector requires a deep understanding of customer preferences and operational efficiencies. Mystery shopping data is invaluable in this regard, offering grocers a detailed view of how well their stores perform against a set of predefined standards. More importantly, it provides a direct comparison with competitors, revealing where a store stands in the market and what it takes to lead.

Mystery Shopping Key Benefits:

Ensure adherence to cleanliness, product freshness, and service quality standards

Identify training opportunities to enhance staff knowledge and customer service skills

Align store practices with grocery shoppers' expectations for a superior shopping experience

Increase the effectiveness and financial return of marketing and operational initiatives in grocery settings



Do you like what you see but are not sure how to get started?

Restarting a Mystery Shopping program can be an overwhelming task but fear not – we're here to assist!

Since many grocers shelved their mystery shopping programs, customer expectations have evolved, and the competitive landscape has shifted. To navigate these changes, we suggest starting with a strategic **Discovery Phase**. Focus on your brand and a few of your key competitors. This will give you a solid foundation so you can review and benchmark your performance in the market.

Here are three essential questions to consider when planning the discovery phase.

What has changed? Adapt your program to post-pandemic shifts in operations, customer interactions, and business models.

What remains the same? Analyze consistent elements for relevant data on your brand against competitors.

What's essential for our business? Focus on key aspects of the customer experience for optimized results.



Once you have the answers, you can move on to implementing your Mystery Shopping program. Leave the daunting task of implementing the program to us at Intouch Insight; we are here to provide you with dedicated support every step of the way.

Make 2024 the year when your customers leave the competitors for your brand.

Getting the Most out of Mystery Shopping in 2024

1. Enhancing Customer Experience in a Competitive Landscape

With the rise of online grocery shopping and delivery services, brick-and-mortar stores need to ensure an exceptional in-store experience to retain customers. Mystery shopping can identify areas where the in-person shopping experience can be improved, such as through better product placement, faster checkout processes, and enhanced customer service.

2. Optimizing Omnichannel Strategies

As groceries expand their online presence, providing a seamless experience across all channels is essential. Mystery shopping can evaluate the integration of digital and physical shopping experiences, assessing the ease of online ordering, pick-up services, and the quality of delivery.

3. Implementing Technology and Innovation

As groceries adopt new technologies, mystery shopping can provide insights into how these innovations affect the shopping experience. This includes evaluating the usability of self-service kiosks, the effectiveness of digital signage, and the convenience of mobile app features.

4. Focusing on Health and Safety Standards

Post-pandemic, shoppers continue to value cleanliness and safety in grocery stores. Mystery shopping can help ensure that health and safety protocols are being followed consistently, enhancing customer trust and loyalty.

By concentrating on these areas, mystery shopping can provide **valuable insights** that help grocery stores adapt to evolving trends, meet customer expectations, and succeed in the competitive 2024 market.



Trends Grocers are Talking About



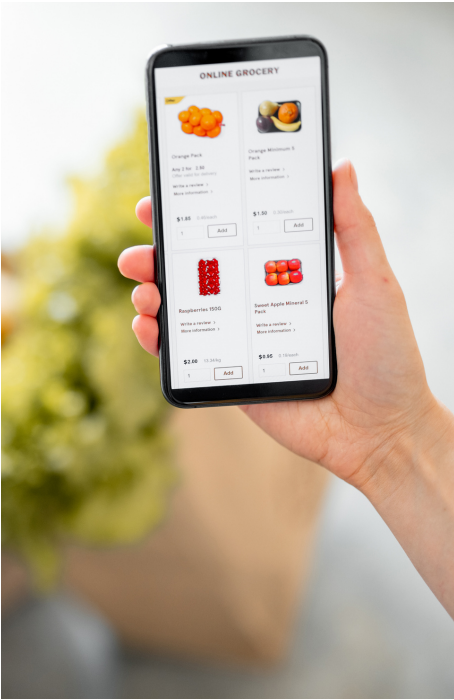
Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations

In 2023, U.S. EV sales exceeded 1 million units by Q3, marking a 58% increase from 2022, showcasing a strong consumer shift towards electric mobility⁵. Major U.S. grocery chains are integrating EV charging stations into their parking lots to attract eco-conscious shoppers and provide added convenience. For example, Kroger has partnered with Blink Charging to install EV charging stations at select locations. Mystery shoppers can assess the availability and functionality of these stations, as well as their impact on shopping duration and customer satisfaction.

Mergers and Acquisitions

The grocery sector continues to experience consolidation as companies strive to increase their market share and enhance efficiency. A recent example is Kroger's planned acquisition of Albertsons for \$24.6 billion, aiming to create a 5,000-store giant. Meanwhile, Aldi's purchase of Winn-Dixie and Harveys and the merger of Foxtrot Market with Dom's Kitchen & Market exemplify the industry's dynamic changes. Mystery shopping can play a crucial role in evaluating the consistency of customer service, branding, and the integration of loyalty programs post-merger.





Technology in Grocery

Grocers are rapidly adopting technology to enhance the shopping experience. For instance, Walmart has introduced Walmart Pay and is testing autonomous delivery vehicles to streamline the shopping and delivery process. Meanwhile, Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods markets are expanding the use of Amazon's Just Walk Out technology, which allows customers to skip the checkout line. Mystery shopping can evaluate how these technologies are being implemented at the store level, their impact on customer experience, and any areas for improvement.

Sustainability Initiative

North American consumers are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their shopping choices. In response, grocery stores are implementing various eco-friendly practices. Trader Joe's, for example, has committed to eliminating one million pounds of plastic from its stores annually and has introduced more sustainable packaging options. Mystery shoppers can assess how well these initiatives are communicated to customers, their visibility in-store, and the consumer response.



By focusing on these trends, mystery shopping programs can provide actionable insights that help grocers adapt to rapidly changing consumer expectations and technological advancements, ensuring they remain competitive and responsive to customer needs in 2024 and beyond.

Conclusion

The current grocery landscape is highly competitive. Restarting mystery shopping programs is, therefore, imperative for brands seeking to thrive in the current landscape.

Restarting your [mystery shopping program](#) will allow you to:

- Identify where your locations are failing to meet brand standards,
- See how your competitors are performing compared to your locations,
- Take strategic action to improve key aspects of your locations' performance,
- Track the impact of these initiatives over time.

Implementing a strong mystery shopping program requires careful planning, execution, and analysis. Partnering with an experienced mystery shopping provider can streamline the process and ensure the program's success. With a comprehensive understanding of your customers' experiences, you can make informed decisions that enhance your business's reputation, drive growth, and exceed customer expectations.

At Intouch Insight, we specialize in helping multi-location grocers run mystery shopping programs based on the latest industry best practices. Our team of experts has over 40 years of experience and can guide you through the process of restarting your program. We offer a suite of solutions that will give you instant access to all your data and a vast network of shoppers. Intouch Insight is the most technologically advanced mystery shopping provider in North America, specializing in delivering deep insight to help our clients drive immediate and impactful action.

Our goal is to help you achieve operational excellence so you can exceed customer expectations, strengthen your brand reputation, and improve financial performance.

Let's get to work!

Contact us today to discuss how we can help you reclaim your edge.

www.intouchinsight.com

1-800-263-2980

letschat@intouchinsight.com

[Explore Mystery Shopping](#)

[Get an Instant Recommendation
using our self-assessment tool](#)