

## **EXTRACT FROM THE OFFICIAL MSPA GUIDELINES FOR MYSTERY SHOPPING**

Applicable in Europe, Africa, Asia Pacific, Latin America Regions

*Updated April 2011*

The full Guidelines can be found, together with MSPA Ethics Codes (in English), at [www.mspa-eu.org/en/ethics.html](http://www.mspa-eu.org/en/ethics.html).

In case of variation due to translation, the English version of this extract shall be taken as definitive.

**MANDATORY: please check the local data protection, privacy, legal, social, tax and ethical issues applicable to mystery shopping in each country within which you are conducting mystery shopping programs, wherever the country of origin of your company may be.**

### **1 - Ethical Principles**

- The objective of a mystery shopping project should be to provide management information on processes and/or quality of service, in order to assist in training plans and improvements in service, and hence increase customer satisfaction, advocacy and loyalty.
- Mystery shopping reports must not be used as the sole justification for reprimands and/or dismissals.
- A mystery shopping company must ensure that their client is aware of the provisions made in these guidelines and obtain agreement that both parties accept them as the basis for the project.

### **2 - Technical Principles**

#### ***Mandatory***

- Mystery Shopping objectively records a client's service delivery. Therefore the scope of a mystery shopping programme must include the variety of conditions that best reflect real customer experiences.
- The shopping scenario must be designed to test the specific sales, service or operational behaviour that is the topic of study. It must be realistic, representing natural consumer behaviour, and be able to be enacted convincingly by the mystery shopper.
- Scenarios used for mystery shopping must be safe in that neither the clients' staff, nor the mystery shoppers must be asked to do anything illegal or that puts them under any kind of risk, that requires them to disclose personal information against their will, or that may lead to unwanted register entries and follow-up approaches to them.
- The client's own staff must be advised that their performance may be checked from time to time through mystery shopping. Where regulatory bodies or sub-contractors intend to use such studies to examine service levels provided, they must ensure that the party to be checked understands that this method of appraisal will be used, and advise its staff accordingly.
- The objectives and intended uses of the results must be made clear to staff.
- Names of staff members or their identities through video, tape etc. can be revealed if staff has been informed about this beforehand. Since staff of a competitor cannot be informed about the research, their identities should not be revealed.
- If bonus programmes are to be based, wholly or partly, on mystery shopping programmes this must be made clear to the staff.

**Advisory Guidelines are available covering other principles, including:**

Multiple mystery shops, factual information, simplicity and brevity and relevancy of the assignment, staff information, pilot test, staff attempting to identify mystery shoppers, commission based staff, website evaluations.

### **3 - Publishing data in the public domain**

The objective of such publication must be focused on building a positive attitude towards mystery shopping as a valid technique and on building a positive attitude towards the MSPA. Findings should concentrate on improvement rather than focus on the providers of poor service.

**Mandatory**

➤ *Mystery shopping initiated by your company:*

Ensure that the press release contains the following:

- Who the initiator/owner of the programme is,
- Confirmation that the programme was conducted by a MSPA member company,
- Confirmation that the programme was conducted under the MSPA Ethical Guidelines,
- A short explanation of main principles of mystery shopping,
- Detailed technical specifications of the programme,
- Presentation of the findings you want to be revealed and published,
- Improvements that ensue from the findings.

➤ *Mystery shopping initiated by media and other (paying) clients:*

- Clearly define with the client the study objectives and the technical specifications.
- Agree on who owns the data and how it can be used.
- Results for organisations other than those under the control or management of the clients, must not enable the identification of individual participants (e.g. employees).

**Advisory Guidelines are also provided for the following**

Actions before starting project, actions after data treatment and prior to publication, key guidance in the preparation of programme reports and in the disclosure of results, making the most of the findings, how to help the media write things you want to be written!, etc.

### **4 - Quality Control**

- Mystery shoppers must be given sufficient Guidelines and briefing.
- The client and company must agree the following: profile of mystery shoppers, briefing requirements, field monitoring processes and quality controls.
- The validation of data must be undertaken by means of computer and/or logic checks or any other relevant means.

### **5 - Agency Responsibilities to mystery shoppers**

- It is mandatory that all mystery shoppers shall receive agreed compensation for each project undertaken and be reimbursed for any pre-authorized purchases made as part of the mystery shopping process.
- It is mandatory that the mystery shoppers shall be informed in writing of the payment processes and timing, and of the consequences of not performing the agreed mystery shopping contacts to the required guidelines, including the consequences of a 'no show' at any of the agreed mystery shopping contacts.