

How to choose a mystery shopping company

Mystery shopping (also called secret shopping) sends a trained, unannounced customer through your phone lines, website and front door. This guide covers what to ask before you hire anyone — including us.

What mystery shopping is – and isn't

It is a structured observation of a real customer interaction, scored against standards you set. It is not a survey of opinions, and it is not a way to catch individual employees out.

At Takeover, the people who do this work are called Verified Shoppers: 21+, ID-checked, and bound by a conduct agreement.

What determines the cost

- Channels: a phone call or web inquiry takes less shopper time than a full in-person visit.
- Number of locations and how many evaluations per location.
- Frequency: a one-time snapshot versus a recurring monthly or quarterly program.
- Purchases: whether the shopper must buy, dine or reimburse a transaction.
- Custom scenarios, scorecards or reporting beyond the standard format.

Questions to ask any provider

1. How are shoppers recruited, vetted and briefed? Is there an age or ID requirement?
2. Who writes the scorecard – and can it reflect our own standards?
3. How do you keep scores consistent between shoppers and visits?
4. Is every report reviewed by a person before we see it?
5. What evidence comes with a score: times, notes, photos where lawful?
6. How do you handle call-recording and privacy laws in our state?
7. What do we get besides a score – is there a clear first priority?
8. Can we see a full sample report before buying?

How consistency should work

- Observable questions (“Was the guest greeted within a minute?”) rather than vague ratings.
- Defined answer choices, including N/A, so shoppers don't guess.
- Timestamps and the shopper's own words behind each section.
- A human quality review before the report is released.

What a good report includes

An overall grade, section scores, the shopper's narrative, available evidence, what went right, and one “do this first” action. See an annotated example in our [sample report](#).

What to do after the findings arrive

Share results fairly, coach one moment at a time, fix the systems behind repeated misses, then re-check. Our [coaching guide](#) walks through it step by step.

Start with the journey closest to your business

See how the evaluation changes for [restaurants](#), [hospitality](#), [retail](#), [fitness and wellness](#), or [home services](#). Each guide shows the moments, questions and report format for that customer journey.