

Secret shopping vs. customer surveys

Both tell you about the customer experience, but they answer different questions. Surveys ask customers how it felt. Secret shopping shows what actually happened.

What customer surveys do well

- Capture how real customers feel after an experience.
- Reach many people at low cost.
- Track satisfaction trends over time.

Where surveys fall short

- You only hear from people who became customers — not the ones who called once and never came back.
- Answers are recollections, often days later, and rarely include specifics like wait times or what was said.
- People who respond tend to be the happiest or the most frustrated.

What secret shopping adds

- A trained observer goes through the experience as a real prospect would — by phone, online or in person.
- Findings are specific and timed: how long until a reply, what was asked, what next step was offered.
- It covers the moments before someone becomes a customer, where many opportunities are lost unseen.
- The same scorecard can be repeated, so improvement is measurable.

When to use each

Use surveys to understand loyalty and satisfaction among existing customers.

Use secret shopping to see whether your standards actually happen — especially first contact, follow-up and the sales or booking conversation.

Use both when a survey score drops and you need to know why.