



## Jancyn Helps Small Retailers Compete with Big Box Stores

In the retail industry, the battle between small retailers and big box stores is a constant struggle. Big box stores often have the advantage of size, resources, and brand recognition, making it challenging for smaller businesses to compete on a level playing field. However, many small retailers have found a secret weapon in the form of mystery shop feedback.

Mystery shopping, also known as secret shopping, is a market research technique where individuals anonymously visit stores, restaurants, banks, or any other customer facing business to assess the quality of service, product offerings, and overall customer experience.

A mystery shop is one of several tools to gather feedback and can work in conjunction with other methods such as receipt and/or online customer surveys and audits. While these methods also have value, Vicki Dempsey, Vice President at Jancyn, Inc based in Alameda, CA, advises their clients a Mystery Shop program is the best way to capture unbiased feedback that measures business goals and training standards that are important to monitor on a regular basis. She says “We work with many small retailers helping them to stay competitive in the face of stiff competition from big box stores. They understand their customers are looking for a higher level of service and product knowledge when making a purchase such as a major tool, hardware or, for example, being assisted with home improvement design ideas or being educated on the right type of tree to plant in their yard. Price is not always their first concern when expertise and dependable service is necessary. This feedback allows our clients to identify areas for improvement, locate blind spots and make necessary adjustments to enhance the customer experience.”

Consider Jancyn client Farm King. For over 65 years Farm King has been a mainstay for the agriculture community in Macomb and throughout West Central Illinois and Eastern Iowa. Jacki Lee, Store Operations and Merchandise Manager tells us they use an easy to remember 4-point customer satisfaction method that matches their mystery shop survey.” The acronym HATS refers to the approach that Farm King salespeople take in serving our customers.

Specifically, HATS correlates to the following: H=Hello, A=Ask, T=Take them, S=Smile! The mystery shopper reports on these interactions during their shop visit. This is one way a mystery shop differs from an online review. The company is looking for specific feedback in how employees are trained and demonstrate the behaviors expected.

By evaluating performance and product knowledge in terms of customer service and overall experience, small retailers can identify opportunities to differentiate themselves and carve out a niche in the market. An employee may introduce themselves or remember a customer's frequent purchase. Everyone enjoys returning to a store where they feel valued and appreciated.

In addition to gathering insights and benchmarking performance, mystery shopping also helps small retailers ensure consistency across their stores. By conducting regular mystery shops at each location, retailers can assess whether their staff is delivering a consistent level of service and adhering to company standards. Consistency is key to building a strong brand reputation and fostering customer loyalty, which are essential for competing with big box stores.

Frank Benzing, the CEO of SummerWinds Nursery, has utilized mystery shopping for over 22 years across their three locations in the greater Phoenix Area and five locations in the Bay Area of California. Besides learning if the stores are tidy and well merchandised, his staff is trained to ask many open-ended questions to advise the customer in their garden needs. Franks tells us "Offering exceptional customer service and maintaining a knowledgeable team are what set us apart. Additionally, we offer an unmatched plant guarantee policy, unlike any big box store. We can confidently provide this benefit to our customers due to our strong commitment to service, quality, and our genuine desire to see our customers succeed in their gardens. Our mystery shops provide valuable insights for continuous improvement."

While the comment sections in the shop report narrative tell a story of the experience, Jancyn also provides clients a 24/7 website with ways to view, sort, categorize, and summarize data. Views can be customized to show virtually any piece of data from the mystery shopping survey. Access to analyze results and compare trends in one place provides the information needed to manage brand expectations and drive improvement with confidence.

Furthermore, mystery shopping allows small retailers to stay agile and responsive to changing market dynamics. By quickly identifying emerging trends or customer preferences through mystery shopping feedback, retailers can adapt their product offerings and service strategies accordingly. This agility enables small retailers to stay ahead of the curve and respond effectively to shifts in consumer behavior, which is crucial in today's fast-paced retail landscape.

At Golden State Lumber, headquartered in Petaluma, CA, Rob Scerri, COO, says in addition to carrying top brands "we ensure our employees are trained on the latest best practices and building trends. This means an unrivaled depth of experience to assist local builders, architects, and contractors who rely on us to provide expert information, materials, and technology. Our

mystery shop feedback helps us focus on all customers, no matter the project size or needs, and as our motto says: when you succeed, we succeed.”

When starting a new program, it is important to effectively communicate the purpose of the mystery shopping program to employees to avoid potential misunderstandings or resentment. When employees understand that mystery shopping is aimed at improving the customer experience, helping to develop their own career skills, and driving business success, they are more likely to embrace the feedback and actively contribute to positive change.

Mystery shopping is a powerful tool that enables small retailers to compete with big box stores by gaining valuable insights, benchmarking performance, ensuring consistency, and staying agile in a dynamic market environment. By leveraging mystery shopping effectively, small retailers can enhance the customer experience with training to build a strong brand reputation, and ultimately thrive in the face of competition from larger competitors.

*For more information on a customized plan for your store or related line of business, please contact Ms. Dempsey at [vicki@jancyn.com](mailto:vicki@jancyn.com).*

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