

It's a Mystery!

READING

Read the text. Are mystery shoppers beneficial?

Mystery Shopping

One of the challenges that all businesses face is quality control. For a business that manufactures goods, quality control may require a particular stage in the production process where a random selection of the goods is examined. But what about businesses that provide service, such as stores or restaurants? One way of evaluating the quality of service is to ask customers about their experience through questionnaires. This is an important part of many businesses' customer service strategy. There are problems with this approach, though. Customer surveys often have a very low response rate, and those who respond are often only the ones who had a particular difficulty. While it can be useful to be aware of those issues, surveys alone may not give a full picture of the overall quality of service. Increasingly, businesses are using another method of assessing the service they provide: mystery shoppers.



Mystery shoppers pretend to be service users and then report on their experiences. As the name suggests, this may involve going into a retail outlet as a customer and buying something, often from a range of products that the business wants to check on. In a world where online shopping is so easy and common, stores need to be confident that they are offering a positive experience to the customer who visits their brick-and-mortar store. To assess this, the mystery shopper goes through the experience in the same way any other customer would, making notes on particular aspects, such as time waiting in line or interactions with staff. Some mystery shoppers even wear hidden cameras to record their experiences. The mystery shopper produces a report, which outlines the main positives and negatives of the experience. Mystery shoppers aren't limited to the world of retail, though, and they are used by businesses ranging from restaurants and fast-food chains to health clubs and movie theaters. They are even used by local governments in some countries to evaluate the effectiveness of the services they provide to the people in their area.

Businesses benefit from this approach in a number of ways. It should lead to a more balanced assessment of the average service user's experience rather than a picture that emphasizes those who have negative experiences. The positive aspects that are identified may lead to bonus payments for staff. Any negative aspects help a business to identify training needs so that staff performance can improve. Some businesses even employ mystery shoppers to visit competitors so that they can see how their offer to the customer compares and act accordingly.

Not everyone feels that mystery shoppers are a good idea. Ethical concerns have been raised about some aspects of the mystery shopper service. On one level, the mystery shopper is deceiving workers, which might be seen to be unfair when a worker's bonus, or even their job itself, may be at risk. Another concern is that the people employed to perform the mystery shopper role are often students or others who may not have a high level of training and who are paid little. This may have an effect on the quality of the report received.

In order to address these concerns, many businesses that employ mystery shoppers ensure that staff are aware that the service user in front of them may be a mystery shopper. These businesses also tend to employ specialist mystery shopper companies so that they can be sure of the quality of information they receive from the process. In addition, some areas, such as some American states, require mystery shoppers to be licensed, and anyone who acts as a mystery shopper without a license can be fined.

quality control (n): regular tests to make sure that products or services are good enough

It's a Mystery!

VOCABULARY

Choose the correct option.

- 1 Some businesses ... products, while others offer services.
a manufacture b manipulate c manifest
- 2 Businesses need to ... their services to see where they can improve.
a provide b process c evaluate
- 3 When you ... to be someone else, you behave like that person.
a copy b act c pretend
- 4 An extra payment you get at work for good performance is a ...
a promotion. b benefit. c bonus.
- 5 When you worry if something is fair and right, you have ... concerns about it.
a logical b ethical c financial

COMPREHENSION

Choose *True* or *False*.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1 One problem with customer surveys is that few people complete them. | True / False |
| 2 Mystery shoppers interview other customers about their experiences. | True / False |
| 3 Paragraph 4 describes some drawbacks of mystery shopping. | True / False |
| 4 Mystery shoppers are always highly trained and experienced. | True / False |
| 5 Some businesses provide expert mystery shoppers to other businesses. | True / False |

It's a Mystery!

READING

Read the article. What is the "Dan Cooper mystery"?

Where's Dan Cooper?

Since the 1970s, millions of Americans have been fascinated by the mysterious disappearance of Dan Cooper (or D.B. Cooper, as he is often incorrectly called in the media) and the story of what happened one afternoon in November 1971 ...

A man calling himself Dan Cooper boarded Northwest Airlines flight 305 in Portland for the city of Seattle, a short 30-minute journey away. He was described by passengers and flight attendants as a business executive and was wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a black tie with a pearl tie pin. Not long after takeoff, the man in seat 18C on the Boeing 727 gave a flight attendant a note saying that he had a bomb in his bag. Cooper then hijacked the plane.

He demanded \$200,000 (worth around \$1.2 million in today's money), four parachutes, food for the crew, and a fuel truck to be waiting at Seattle airport to refuel the plane when it arrived. The airline company agreed to all Cooper's demands. The plane landed in Seattle, and an airline employee delivered a backpack full of the money and the parachutes. All the passengers and two flight attendants were then released.

Cooper told the crew that he wanted the plane to fly south east toward Mexico with another refueling stop in Nevada. The plane took off again, but 45 minutes into the flight, Cooper sent the flight attendant into the cockpit, put on a parachute, tied the backpack full of money to himself, and jumped out of the rear of the plane somewhere over Portland, Oregon. Five aircraft in total followed the hijacked plane, out of view of Cooper, but none of the crew reported seeing him jump or could say exactly where he may have landed. When the plane arrived in Reno, they found the remaining three parachutes and, on the seat where Cooper had been sitting, his black tie. (The FBI was later able to take DNA from the tie to try and match it with the "real" Dan Cooper.)

The army was called in after the hijacking and sent around 1,000 soldiers to search the area where Cooper could have landed. The Boeing 727 used in the hijacking was flown over the ocean and weights were dropped to try and find out when Cooper jumped, but no sign of him or the backpack full of money was found.

But in 1980, just north of Portland, a young boy called Brian Ingram was digging in the sand at a place called Tena Bar when he found three separate bundles of money still held together with elastic bands. There was a total of \$5,800 and the numbers on the notes matched the numbers on the money that was given to Cooper. (Ingram sold 15 of these notes at an auction in 2008 for about \$37,000). The FBI searched and analyzed the area, but nothing was found to show that Cooper had landed safely after jumping from the plane. Despite the FBI case has been opened for nearly 45 years, no conclusions have been made about who Dan Cooper really was or what happened to him. Did he survive the jump and manage to escape with the rest of the money? No one, at this point in time, knows. It remains the only unsolved case of aircraft hijacking in history.



auction (n): an official sale where something is sold to the person who agrees to pay the highest price

bundles (n): a group of things that have been tied together

fascinated by (adj): very interested in something

parachute (n): a large piece of cloth connected to heavy strings that a person wears so they can jump out of an airplane

refuel (v): to put more fuel into a vehicle or airplane

unsolved (adj): an unsolved mystery is one that hasn't been explained

It's a Mystery!

VOCABULARY

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

bomb cockpit demanded flight attendant hijack

- 1 A _____ dating from the Second World War was found when the new train station was built.
- 2 Someone tried to _____ the aircraft and force the pilot to fly to Cairo.
- 3 The police officer _____ that Dad show him his driver's license.
- 4 Entry to the _____ is only permitted to the pilot and crew.
- 5 Lily has worked as a _____ for Singapore Airlines for six years.

COMPREHENSION

Complete the sentences with a number, a word, or a short phrase.

- 1 The flight time between Portland and Seattle is around _____ an hour.
- 2 The man who called himself Dan Cooper looked like _____.
- 3 _____ saw Cooper jump from the rear of the plane.
- 4 Cooper left his _____ on the plane when he jumped.
- 5 Only _____ of the money Cooper was given was found.

It's a Mystery!

READING

Read the text. What is a *curiosity gap*?

Would You Like to Know More? Click Here!

Spend any amount of time on the internet and you will certainly come across someone trying to use the curiosity gap to get you to click on a link. A typical example of the use of this technique might be an image of eggs with the heading "We tried this amazing diet ... and it worked!" Another example might use a photo of a celebrity from 20 years ago with the heading "You won't believe what these 12 celebs look like now!" It's a powerful technique that has become a standard way of generating clicks online. Websites such as BuzzFeed and Upworthy are full of this type of heading. However, the idea predates the internet. In 1994, Academic George Loewenstein wrote a paper entitled *The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation* where he described how advertisers used the curiosity gap in so-called "mystery" ads in which the product being advertised is only revealed at the end of the ad. Researchers found that consumers remembered brands that used "mystery" ads more than they remembered brands that showed the product at the start of the ad.



Why does this technique work? The curiosity gap is the difference between what we currently know and what we would like to know. We are uncomfortable when our attention is drawn to a gap in our knowledge and we feel the need to fill that gap by finding out more. Not all curiosity gaps are equal, though. If you're not interested in dieting or celebrities, you probably wouldn't be persuaded to click on the examples mentioned above. However, there will be other areas where you will feel a strong need to fill the curiosity gap, perhaps in an area connected to your career or in an area that you are particularly interested in. A nurse, for example, may be tempted to click on a link with the heading "6 times doctors were proved wrong" because it's very closely connected to his or her area of expertise and the nurse may expect to learn something useful by following the link.

A similar idea is that of *clickbait*, which refers to links and headings that are designed to generate as many clicks as possible. However, the difference lies in how the person following the link feels after seeing the promised information. With clickbait, the information revealed doesn't fulfill the promise of the heading and the reader feels that they have been fooled into clicking on something that doesn't, in fact, fill their curiosity gap. Essentially, clickbait is a con that simply provides advertising income for a webpage. Other uses of the curiosity gap genuinely do provide meaningful information, even though the purpose is still to attract people to a site in order to sell as much advertising space as possible.

Another way in which businesses use the curiosity gap is through *teaser campaigns*. These may be used in the lead-up to the release of a new movie, video game, or other product. In a teaser campaign, information about the final product is revealed gradually over a series of ads, either online through websites and email or offline in the form of posters and magazine ads. The first may simply say that something big is coming and give a date. Combine that with a recognizable symbol, such as the Apple logo or the Batman symbol, and you have immediately created a very powerful curiosity gap for anyone interested in technology or action movies. Further ads reveal a little more about the final product until the advertisers have very highly raised people's expectations by the time the product is finally released. This and other ways of using the curiosity gap are such successful marketing techniques that we can be sure they will continue to be used by a wide range of businesses in years to come.

It's a Mystery!

VOCABULARY

Match the words to the sentences.

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1 When you ... two things, you put them together. | a attract |
| 2 When you ... a product, you make it available to buy. | b combine |
| 3 When you ... something, you let it become known. | c generate |
| 4 When you ... people to a website, they visit it. | d release |
| 5 When you ... something, you create or produce it. | e reveal |

COMPREHENSION

Choose the correct option.

- 1 People use the curiosity gap ...
 - a to help other people find health information.
 - b to explain how things have changed recently.
 - c to increase visits to websites.
- 2 Consumers remember brands better when the product ...
 - a is mentioned at the beginning of an ad.
 - b isn't mentioned during an ad.
 - c is mentioned at the end of an ad.
- 3 You are more likely to click on a link when it ...
 - a is connected to your job.
 - b explains ways in which people can be wrong.
 - c is about something to do with your health.
- 4 Clickbait uses the curiosity gap but doesn't ...
 - a use images to attract people.
 - b provide interesting information.
 - c make money for advertisers.
- 5 A teaser campaign ...
 - a gradually tells you more about a product.
 - b only works for technology and entertainment.
 - c leaves people feeling disappointed.