

LATEST NEWS FROM THE MSPA: COVID-19 RESPONSES TO DATE

The future of Mystery Shopping and how it will embed service culture in our new world

With some countries unlocking and opening the front door to a challenging new world, consumer habits and priorities will have changed. This coupled with new legislation to protect us means that every form of commerce (retail, leisure, dining, hotel and transport to name a few) are changing, and fast. Rapid, agile reinvention is key, but ideas are no good without new action and new energy at the point where the organisation meets the customer, at a safe distance of course!

The MSPA (Mystery Shopping Professionals Association) in Europe and Africa has engaged all of its members in a rapid plan of action to mobilise responses to the crisis, in ways that deliver the balance between safety and business for the clients they serve. Over the last 4 weeks the MSPA have held 4 Webinars attended by members across the region and globally. Topics have covered how to handle clients, colleagues, shoppers and how to build a new value proposition for clients in these challenging times. The rapid exchange of status, views and action plans has been further informed by polls and surveys of companies providing Mystery Shopping services all over Europe and Africa.



Stefaan Vandroogenbroeck, President of MSPA Europe and Africa says, “Responses have been amazing, it is encouraging to see our members working together to see how each are coping and what we can collectively do together to help our clients to achieve an excellent customer experience in challenging times”.

Initial responses obviously showed an immediate and responsible lockdown of face to face mystery shopping to prevent any harm to clients. 82% of members polled at the beginning of April 2020 had stopped face-to-face work immediately, the balance fulfilling online shopping assignments, and over 80% immediately talking with clients about future plans.

Stefaan goes on to say, “It is clear that our members are taking every opportunity to understand our clients and help them through difficult times and start preparing for a new future, with different customer experience needs.”

The period of Pause and Reflection is an important part of how Mystery Shopping Professionals are responding to the crisis, with many taking the time to invest in training, process review and their proposition.

Later polling shows how quickly things are changing and reactions are taking place as a result. As of April 22nd, 66% of MSPA members are now actively engaged in new sales opportunities, with many focussing on COVID-19 specific services.

“The tide is turning” says Stefaan. 63% of members now have created a COVID – 19 specific Mystery Shopping service and 31% are already conducting specific work for clients.

39% are embedding COVID – 19 specific questions into existing work with their clients.

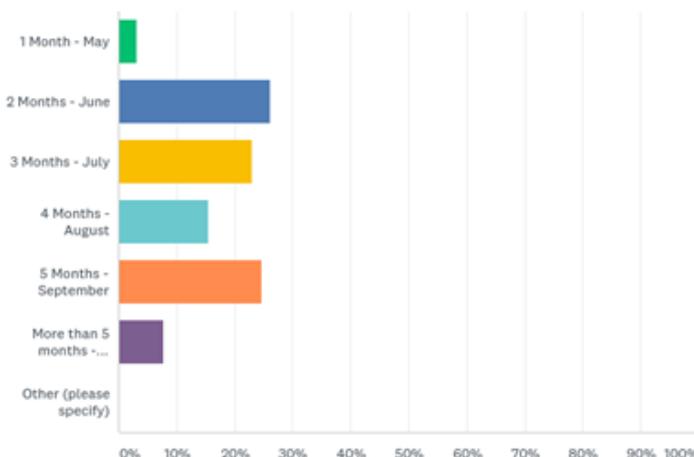
The most successful businesses will be on this journey already, adjusting what they have to a new world of social distancing, challenged colleagues and nervous customers. The brands that balance product, premises, people and price in a hygienic, accessible and empathetic way will be the new winners. Winning for themselves, their colleagues and of course their customers.

However, we must recognise that countries, sectors and customers are all at different stages and the times for return to a new normal is unclear. During this phase it is important to be empathetic to colleagues, clients and mystery shoppers. The timeline continues to evolve, but latest predictions from our members show that the new world could emerge as soon as June, with many expecting September 2020.

The MSPA members survey of 22nd April shows a variety of responses, but the journey is only just beginning...



Thinking ahead, how many months do you think it will be before things start to improve in your country ?



In summary, a brand is the sum total of product, promise, price, premises and the people that represent it. A great customer experience is the sum of these parts, however brand loyalty has been challenged by the world crisis as every dimension of a brand experience needs review and reinvention – consumers now literally and emotionally stand back by 1.5 to 2 metres... so good business means rapid evaluation and agility to change.

In essence the MSPA has recommended considering a simple 3-part action plan...

1. **Review.** Conduct consumer opinion and customer audits to understand new priorities,
2. **Plan.** Deliver training and coaching to embed these with the frontline and
3. **Act.** Start mystery shopping to reinforce these priorities by measuring with speed and accuracy at the point of customer contact.

The Association is working with its members to deliver clear value propositions to clients that help them through these times. With relevant services delivered with agility and empathy to clients, colleagues and mystery shoppers. Focussing on the needs of all parts of the customer experience community as it moves forward.



Mystery shopping is the catalyst to change frontline methods, recognising the best performance and identifying places for improvement. With the lens of inspection, we can all improve.

Today, more than ever it is good to be under a microscope! We recommend clients take the time to talk about the options with their MSPA supplier, mystery shoppers and colleagues take the time to learn and develop, and our members stay tuned and keep evolving rapidly.

For more information or to find an MSPA member please visit <https://mspa-ea.org/>

The MSPA (Mystery Shopping Professionals Association) was founded in 1990, and now represents over 500 companies around the world who provide professional Mystery Shopping services. The aim of the Association is to uphold ethical and professional Mystery Shopping practice. The Association helps all its members Connect, Learn and Share to create best practice for clients, business opportunities for members and guidance for mystery shoppers.