



# Secret Shopper Service

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Waiting outside the pickup window at one of my previously favorite dine-in restaurants, I took a much-needed break from my phone and peeked inside. Where once were tables and chairs for my friends and I, there were now metal racks with to-go packaging and beverages. My favorite red sofa and the warm fireplace that invited me to sit and relax while I waited for a table was no longer in sight, but instead a restaurant storage area with cold, disorganized metro shelving. I asked the person who handed me my food, “Do you think you guys will open the dining room this summer?” She responded “I don’t think so. I’m hoping we never do. We are just as busy as before, and it’s easier just to pack up to-go items than serve someone for over an hour”. Ambivalence and unprofessionalism aside, it was an interesting point.

For over two years, the restaurant industry has endured a significant disruption. The pandemic has changed the way restaurants need to operate on almost every level. For some time, distance and safety have taken priority over the ‘team vibe’ and superior service experience. Familiarity makes us feel comfortable, which is why it feels so good to return home after a long vacation or work trip. It is why customers frequent the same grocery and retail stores. It is why going back into the workplace in ‘real’ clothes now feels daunting.

Now more than ever, the strategy for how to move your restaurant forward needs to be revisited. What has worked pre and mid pandemic may not be working now. *How will you know?* You can start with the KROST Secret Shopper Service. Secret shopping, sometimes called mystery shopping, is a practice of using undercover shoppers to gather data about your restaurant. These programs exist for almost any consumer item, from eating at a restaurant to buying blinds for your home.

**There are several reasons why shoppers are a good start:**

## OBJECTIVE FEEDBACK

Many restaurants moved away from the service aspect as dining stopped during the pandemic and relied on employees, friends, families, and online reviews to assess their guest’s experience. However, this practice is highly subjective and biased. They may hold back on giving negative comments because they think it may hurt your feelings or get a colleague in trouble.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Restaurant customers spend a lot more time in your establishment, giving them a more direct and intimate interaction with the staff. You can’t expect to receive honest reactions if you ask them directly or role-play during a staff meeting.



## CONTROL WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR

Online reviews often do not contain details about your business practices. Secret shoppers provide a written account of every area of your business to use in your decision-making. They also allow you to ask restaurant or brand-specific questions. Was the interaction friendly? Was the dining room warm and inviting? Did the server introduce themselves and have their name tag on? Was the food cleared in 'x' amount of time?

Secret shopping can also help you determine if your restaurant remains consistent in a particular area. You can spot-check if something has declined in the quality of your service by doing monthly assessments.

## PROACTIVE MEASURES

Don't sit back and wait for customer feedback, especially feedback posted publicly on social media that can highlight weak areas of your restaurant. By the time you read it online, it could be too late. Negative postings can not only cost you current customers, but future ones as well.

Newly re-opened restaurants can take advantage of this service to spot areas they can improve as the allowance of understanding is still active in the post-pandemic restaurant customer.

Many of you have changed your menus, updated delivery methods, or altered service. Is it still working? Did you take off a favorite item because you needed to reduce the size? Should you bring that dish back? Do you want to return to handheld menus or keep the QR Code?

## EMPLOYEE EVALUATIONS

You likely have spent a lot of time training and coaching your employees to get them to the standards you would like your restaurant to be at, but how do you know if those same standards are upheld when you aren't there? It is crucial for restaurants to identify an issue that is being caused by the staff or management. This is where our friend from the takeout window might have lost points.



## LEARN YOUR COMPETITION

Did you know you can secret shop at competing restaurants? You can replicate your shopper program for a competing restaurant and see how they measure up. You may even be able to adopt some of their best practices.

Repeat guests are extremely valuable and their business is much cheaper than the cost of acquiring new customers.

Getting customers to recommend your restaurant to their families and friends is an excellent step towards successful branding in the industry. Only by knowing exactly what your guests are experiencing can you truly deliver a constantly improving guest experience that leaves your customers excited to return with their family and friends.

Enter KROST Secret Shopping Services. The current market for Secret Shopper Services has been diluted across industries and finding a restaurant-specific shopper partner is more challenging than you would expect. Many competitors hire 'gig-workers' to conduct their Secret Shopper services, giving you a distinct advantage in that our service will be conducted by Restaurant Industry Professionals. Our service gives clients a clear view into the 'dining experience' a guest receives at their location. Through one-on-one meetings, we create customized scoring, identifying location specific items you would like shopped and assigning value as pertains to standards. Ultimately, you will be given the tools to help coach and counsel employees and teams falling below internal guidelines and keeping your standards at 100%.

Contact [jeanette.fox@krostcpas.com](mailto:jeanette.fox@krostcpas.com) to begin your customized service today! ■

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