

Perfect Work-At-Home Job Update
Issue 33

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Mystery Shopper Coach's Corner
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2001 NCPMS Winner--Newsletter Of The Year, 2002 NCPMS Finalist
The free monthly e-zine devoted to professional mystery shopping
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Welcome! In this issue you'll find:

1. Feature Article: "Coach's Diary: Online Reporting + Tips For Taming The Online Beast"
2. "Ask The Coach"--my answers to your mystery shopping questions
3. An Amusing Mystery Shopper Anecdote

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1. Feature Article: " Coach's Diary: Online Reporting + Tips For Taming The Online Beast"

Reader Story contributed by Kim A., Dayton, OH
Editor's Tips By Melanie Jordan, e-mail: mysteryshopcoach@aol.com

This month we have a "guest coach", Kim A. from Dayton, OH who shares with us her recent experience with online reporting. Right after Kim's story, please see my tips on improving your chances of success with online reporting.

I was scheduled for two shops at two locations of the same scenario. The shops were easy. Submitting the reports was a different story! I have to say that deciding to become a Mystery Shopper appealed to me because of the automated and online convenience and up to now it has not been a problem. So...what to do if your computer is down or your reports are not getting to where they are supposed to be on time?

I performed my shops to the best of my ability and carefully noted all important details and information. I spread the shops over two days so that each shop would not be confused with the other. I submitted my first report--I thought--but later noticed an error on the page. Grrr. I submitted the information again. In the meantime I did the other shop and went to submit its report the next day. Something didn't seem right. I was beginning to panic because the shop reports were due ASAP.

In desperation, I sent an email to the shop scheduler and explained my situation and asked if they had my reports? Her answer was no, would I please submit them again? I was concerned by now that this experience would reflect poorly on my performance because the reports were now LATE and asked for her patience, etc. Mind you, these shop reports took me at least an hour or so to complete. I was afraid by this time that I would miss important details. One more time I attempted the reports. This time I received the "thumb's up" response rather than an error message and was very relieved. I'm not sure where the technical error began, but at first I know the first problem started on my computer.

My advice to anyone in this situation is to communicate, communicate, communicate! There is nothing worse than playing a waiting game when both a paycheck and your professional reputation are at stake. I am still a firm believer in the convenience and stability of online submissions, but mistakes can happen and computers do crash. I make sure I have the telephone number of my scheduler as soon as I get a shop assignment just in case. It's always good to have a back up.

MELANIE'S NOTES: This is one of the big problems with on-line reporting. When it works, great, when it doesn't you can waste a lot

of time. Here is my trick for dealing with on-line reporting. I always have the form downloaded and printed out to work with for the assignment anyway, so what I do is open up a word file and any question that has more than a couple of words in an answer, I type onto a blank word document first. Then when I go on-line I just cut and paste (you usually have to do CTRL-C for copying and then CTRL-V to paste on the form).

This way, you not only speed up your input time and are less likely to be signed off or lose the form, but if the report does not go through it is a lot easier to re-submit. Unfortunately, if your report does not go through, you do need to re-submit or you don't get paid. That's why I like it best when a company e-mails me forms that I fill in and e-mail back. If they don't get the report, I just e-mail it again. However, not all reports are handled this way.

Other things I do when I must use online reporting are:

--I make sure I record any conformation numbers that I am given and hold onto them until I am paid.

--I print out a screen that says "thank you for your submission" even if it doesn't have any other info as further proof of submission.

--I also always e-mail the scheduler to let him/her know I have completed the report and just submitted it online, including the date and time of submission, and request verification that the report was actually received in good shape on their end. And I make sure to keep a copy of this e-mail in case of a problem. Even in our electronic age, paper documentation is always king to me until the check is in-hand!

--If you don't hear back on an e-mail you sent, and the shop report deadline is approaching or has occurred, I would call to ensure report receipt if at all possible. Too many shoppers when communicating with a scheduler will say, well, I sent an e-mail. Despite the ease of e-mail, sometimes there is just no substitute for picking up the phone.

Have a story of your own? As a subscriber to my free monthly e-zine "Perfect Work-At-Home Job Update", you are welcome to submit your own stories of unusual and educational shopping experiences, and the best will be published on my site with full credit given to you. You'll be featured as a "Guest Coach". Those submissions can be made by e-mail to me at mysteryshopcoach@aol.com. Please include your name, city and

state and contact e-mail address with your submission (your e-mail address will not be published and we can either use your full name, first name and last initial or vice-versa).

Note: Find more great articles like this at Mystery Shopper Coach's Corner at <http://www.mysteryshoppercoach.com> (click on the button marked "articles" and "diary" for previous Coach's Diary pieces)

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2. "Ask The Coach"

Question: I have been a shopper for many years. I recently began

shopping for a company that is new to me. Well, I have seen that they shop some of the same companies that other schedulers assign and have also noticed a discrepancy in the fees paid (or not paid at all!). I brought up this point with the scheduler and was told that I could take it or leave it, that many people would take a no-fee shop because they saw perceived value in the reimbursement alone. What do you think?

Answer From Melanie: Different schedulers and companies booking jobs can set whatever shop fees they wish as they are, in effect, subcontracting the work out. It's their call as to what they want to offer a shopper and they have to balance this against the need to be able to book the shop, and also ensure that they get a shopper that does a quality job. The top companies and schedulers who recognize the value of a professional doing their shopping, vs. one who is just trying to squeeze the most profit out of things, are the ones to work for. The best action is to not take on the job and hopefully the company lowballing the shop fee will get what they pay for--a lesser quality shop report--and their client will drop them.

Question: Is the market saturated with experienced shoppers and therefore is competition tough for the "good" shops?

Answer From Melanie: No. Competition can be heavy for some types of shops as many people love the "mall rat" low-paying shops and restaurants/fast food shops. Those are rare for me because I almost always do my mystery shopping for money, not love!

Since new faces are needed all of the time due to client rotation requirements (which can make you ineligible to repeat a shop for anywhere from 30 days to a year), you will eventually get your shot. This is especially true if you are good, flexible in your schedule, are politely persistent and market yourself well. I feel the market is over-saturated with dabblers who don't treat this work as a professional part-time line of work, and just want to go to the mall and get a freebie every now and then. And if that's what you like to do, more power to you, but I know that most of you are in this to actually make money, so the more skill needed for the shop, the less competition you'll have for it.

Question: How do you "get through" to a company scheduler that you would like to obtain assignments from? I have called, e-mailed and practically groveled for jobs from one particular mystery shopping company that has a lot of jobs in my area. The scheduler is always

very polite on the telephone, but will not give me any work. Any suggestions?

Answer From Melanie: I go over marketing yourself in lots more detail in both of my mystery shopping books than I can possibly go through here, but essentially I have always found that the best way to break through is to stay in contact with a polite, professional e-mail from time-to-time. I'd say no more frequently than every 4-6 weeks unless you are applying for an assignment from a specific lead of theirs, and emphasize (if it's true) that you are experienced, reliable and are often able to jump in at the last minute to assist with the cancellation from a less dependable shopper. Then when you get that call or e-mail, if you can possibly do the job, do it. Then you'll be in.

Do you have a question to "Ask The Coach"? Please e-mail me your question at mysteryshopcoach@aol.com. I will select the best ones received each month for publication in this e-zine. Either way, I will personally answer your question as quickly as my schedule permits via e-mail. So feel free to contact me --you will get my response back (not an autoresponder--but be sure to use the mysteryshopcoach@aol.com address, the mscoach@aweber.com one is just for e-zine subscriptions).

--Melanie Jordan, editor

3. An Amusing Mystery Shopper Anecdote contributed by R Baker, Olympia, WA

I have a mail box at a private company for all important things like my shopping checks. The place knows me well and knows that I do mystery shopping. A short time ago, the place changed owners although the manager and staff stayed. A week ago, the manager wanted to talk with me. It seems with the new owner, they are now subject to mystery shopping. She had a list of the items that the owner provided that the shopper would be looking for. The manager was seeking my advice as a shopper on how to meet some of the requirements! I told her about how I would judge certain behaviors. Her parting comment was "I don't know if we've been shopped yet or not." I didn't tell her that she had, indeed, been shopped. I had done it three days earlier!

Have an amusing mystery shopping or merchandising anecdote to share?
E-mail me at mysteryshopcoach@aol.com and I'll share the best ones
from time-to-time in this e-zine with full credit given to you!

Watch for the next issue of "Perfect Work-At-Home Job Update"
in about a month. Your comments, questions and suggestions
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complete form with all contact information intact to any other
mystery shoppers you know, or anyone who might never have
otherwise thought about the possibility of mystery shopping as a
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