

GfK Mystery Shopping CASE STUDY

Toyota GB

Beyond such factors as choice, price and convenience, the purchase 'experience' can be the determining factor that clinches the sale – particularly in a turbulent economic climate when consumers need extra reassurance that their purchase is well placed and highly valued.

Toyota, in particular, holds up the direct link between how valued and important customers are made to feel at each stage of the selection-and-purchase journey and their overall satisfaction with the Toyota brand as a crucial element in achieving Toyota's sales volume and market share aspirations.

As part of its ongoing commitment to delivering the best customer experience, Toyota GB runs an extensive mystery shopping ('Performance Evaluation') programme, designed to identify potential areas for business and process improvement within the customer journey. This mystery shopping programme is a crucial part of their investment mix - and one that delivers proven ROI by supporting and quantifying their sales process best practice. The results of their mystery shopping programme are used to design effective counter measures to improve the customer buying experience across all touch-points, which, in turn, increases consumer affinity with the Toyota brand.

Since 2002, Toyota has been working with leading agency GfK Mystery Shopping to deliver its Performance Evaluation programme. In fact, until last year, mystery shopping was part of the Centre Standards Programme. Each Centre would receive a mystery shopper phone call, physical visit and email shop every quarter. While this fulfilled the broad purpose, the company found that, because no two Centres are the same, they needed a revised methodology to give a fairer and fuller picture which would allow more accurate and real-life like-for-like comparisons between Centres.

From January 2008, therefore, Toyota revised its Standards Programme, enabling the mystery shopping solution to focus purely on gaps within the customer buying process, and necessary counter measures to resolve them and improve Centre performance.

Toyota's Mystery Shopping strategy continues to evolve in synergy with changing market demands. In 2008, the programme was adapted to cover fewer Centres each quarter but with more 'shops' at each, in order to focus upon those Centres which need most attention in terms of improving customer service and/or sales performance. GfK Mystery Shopping 'shopped' 60-80 sales Toyota Centres per quarter, continuing to use phone calls, physical visits and emails, but adding a fourth measure on how effectively e-mail and Call Centre requests for a test drive were being fulfilled.

Going into 2009 the programme continues to prove its worth, allowing Toyota to provide the Centres which require most attention with accurate like-for-like comparisons on best practice together with the most useful, proven and workable recommendations for improvement.

GfK Mystery Shopping is instrumental in developing and executing this strategy, and has been retained by Toyota for the foreseeable future, after winning a tender process in 2007 against nine other agencies.

Nick Wilson, Sales Development Manager at Toyota GB, comments, "We chose GfK Mystery Shopping because they have proven themselves as an innovative, robust and high-value research partner and are particularly strong in demonstrating a clear return on investment. They bring us invaluable experience from other sectors, ensuring that our Evaluation Programme is class-leading and, critically, they are able to react very quickly and effectively in adapting our programme to match the demands of a very fast moving industry."