

Mystery Shopping Exposed: The Truths & The Myths

by Cynthia Alexander
(A \$19.95 value)

Many of us have seen the ads online and off touting how you can make “good money,” a part time or even a full time income doing “mystery or secret shopping.” Some say you can make between \$10 - \$60 an hour or more. Well, that is *technically* true. But it’s stretching the truth a bit. You may have heard a lot of great things associated with mystery shopping, but people avoid talking about the down side. And that down side may be enough to make you reconsider mystery shopping altogether. I’m here to reveal the truth and the misconceptions about mystery shopping. Understand, this is *my* story and *my* opinion based on *my* experience as a mystery shopper. I don’t recommend or endorse anything that I haven’t done myself.

What I’m about to reveal may not always be pretty and it may discourage you somewhat. While you’re reading this, you may think I’m just being bitter. I am not. I’m just spilling the beans. I hold nothing back. I’m giving you my honest opinion and I try to be as fair and objective as possible. It’s up to you to make up your own mind after your read this. I want you to go into this (becoming a secret shopper) with your eyes wide open and knowing all the facts up-front. That way you can make an informed decision. I wish I had a report like this when I first started.

I’m not going to go in depth into what mystery shopping is. Most of you who have gotten this report got it because you already know or have an idea what mystery shopping is. However, for those who aren’t sure. Here is the definition from the Mystery Shopping Providers Association website: Mystery Shopping is the practice of using trained shoppers to anonymously evaluate customer service, operations, employee integrity, merchandising, and product quality.

You can mystery shop for practically any service or product you can think of: food, mattresses, doctors offices, car repair, golf courses, electronics, cell phone service, financial institutions, plumbers, etc. Major corporations pay mystery shopping companies to get a read on customer service and to find out if their rules and procedures are being followed. Basically to see how things are running in their establishments. These corporations hire mystery shopping companies who turn around and hire folks like you and me to do the actual ‘shop.’

Who is Mystery Shopping For?

Mystery shopping on any sort of regular basis is really for stay at home Moms, people who have plenty of spare time or someone with an *extremely* flexible schedule. If you live in a large city, the shops may be clear across town and make it difficult for you to get to them in a timely manner, even if you only do shops in the evening (especially if you get off work late and have to deal with traffic like so many of us do.) Lots of notifications are for “emergency” or “urgent” shops (that generally means that the person who initially signed up for the job can’t do it or it’s a rescheduled shop so they need it done FAST!) Usually, notifications come about 1-2 weeks before a job is due, sometimes longer. But “emergency/urgent” shops may need you to do it the very next day, that’s why you need a flexible schedule.

You also must be intelligent. You will need to write out your reports and you have to be able to articulate your observations well. Some shopping companies even require a sample of your writing skills before they will put you on their roster. So if you have problems with grammar or vocabulary (for ex. you don’t know when to use “capitol” vs

“capital”) and English was your worst subject in school, mystery shopping isn’t for you. The dictionary and the Thesaurus will become your best friends.

Also, (this is a given) I’m assuming that since you got this report over the internet, that you have internet access. You **MUST** have internet access to mystery shop today. In the past, you could do it via the phone. Most companies now send out their notifications via email and make you reply the same way.

How Much Should I Pay to Find Out About Mystery Shopping Jobs?

First and foremost, there is **NO** need to pay for mystery shopping information. But since it’s so confusing, we do it anyway. Once I paid to be a member of a mystery shopping site, they had the names of many mystery shopping companies. When I went to those sites, one of the first things they said on the website was **NOT** to pay for any mystery shopping info because it was available for **FREE!**

Don’t be fooled by any company that promises to send you a list for your money or promises to get you jobs. They can’t. You have to be selected. Only the scheduler can do that. Don’t pay anyone for secret shopping information. I’ll give you the name of a very good website that lists *hundreds* of mystery shopping companies and best of all, it won’t cost you one thin dime. They will keep you plenty busy. And you won’t have to pay \$20, \$30 or more to find out the names of these companies. It’s my gift to you.

Why Am I Giving Away This Information?

Simple. Give and ye shall receive. I want to help people who may have spent money on this type of info before and got burned. (I've done it.) I want to help people who might not be able to pay for this information but may really *need* it. (I've been there before.) Even if I only sold it for \$20 or \$30. That small amount can mean the difference between paying the utility bill and not having lights. I know the feeling. I've had to dig in my change jar and buy food with dimes and quarters. Even \$20 back then was a luxury I couldn't afford. I believe in karma. So if I do something good for others now, I hope I will be repaid in the future.

How Do I Get My First Job If I've Never Done This Before?

The hardest part about getting an assignment (which is the term they use for getting a mystery shopping job) is to get that FIRST one. It's almost a Catch 22. If you have no experience, the schedulers are reluctant to assign you a job. And I found that many of the notifications that I received stated that you MUST be an experienced shopper or have a rating of a certain number. None of which I had. So here was the million dollar question: How do you get experience if you have no experience?

Most of the notifications that I received tell you to reply to a specific email address if you are interested in doing the shop. They ask for your pertinent information, generally name, address, city, state, phone and email address. What I found is if you just reply with that information, you WILL NOT get assigned. I learned this the hard way. You have to remember that the schedulers (who are mainly women) are people too. And they have to make a decision whom to select based on your email alone. Sending just the info they ask for doesn't tell the scheduler anything about YOU and why she should pick

you. If they've never heard of you, they are not going to take a risk on an "unknown." Their reputation is on the line not yours.

Think of it like you're applying for a job every time you get a notification. Every company is a new employer. The trick to getting selected is to SELL YOURSELF in your email reply. It took me awhile to figure it out. But when I did, that's how I got my first shop. Tell them that you have no experience or limited experience or whatever the case, but that you have the *qualities* that will make a good "mystery shopper." Then go on to list those qualities, like being reliable, dependable, detail-oriented, are available on short notice (this is a BIG plus because so many people flake out on the jobs - I read 35%), etc.

Some requests to apply are done straight through the mystery shopping company's website so you have no chance to sell yourself. (You just enter your name and password.) Chances are that if you have no prior experience with the company sending out the invitation, you won't get assigned the shop. In time, if you keep applying and the schedulers start to recognize your name and/or email address, eventually they'll break down and assign you your first shop with them. You have to keep applying and keep applying and keep applying. Persistence is the key.

For the ones that give you the opportunity to reply via email, don't send a bare bones email. Don't forget, you've got to *sell* yourself. Even though I'd paid for membership into a mystery shopping site that had lots of information on it, I was not told that one very VALUABLE bit of information. That's one reason why so many people get involved and then drop out, discouraged. They don't receive any assignments.

Here's a tip: write out your qualification statement (I call it my 'sales pitch') and save it on your computer. Re-use it every time you apply for a shop. Make changes as needed. (For example, if the first time you sent it out you had no experience but you've since done a shop, update your statement accordingly.) Just make sure that you don't send the exact same one to the same company until the shop has been assigned and (very important) completed. The schedulers get so many replies to the notifications that they don't keep your email after the job has been completed. So I wouldn't worry about them remembering your sales pitch.

Do I Apply to Every Company to Get Jobs?

No one told me how many companies to apply to either. I learned that the hard way also. There are over 500 (and possibly close to a thousand) mystery shopping companies out there. And if you sign up with all of them, you will not do a single shop. I'll tell you why. Number one, the applications can take anywhere from 5 minutes to 15-20 minutes to fill out. If each application took 10 minutes to fill out on average, you would spend over 83 hours just filling out 500 applications! Sign up for 5 - 10 mystery shopping companies a day for a week and gauge how many notifications you start to receive.

Another tip: Keep a list of all the companies you apply for and all the log in names and passwords you use with each one. I try to use the same login name and password on all of them so I don't have to remember lots of them. Sometimes you're not able to, but be sure and make a note of the password and log in name associated with each one and keep them together. I keep a copy in a program like Microsoft Excel or WordPerfect's Quattro Pro *and* a 'hard physical copy' in a notebook.

Save all your vital information on your computer so you don't have to type it in every time you apply to a company. I keep mine on the same page that I keep my sales pitch on. That way I have everything in one place and I don't have to go search all over for it.

I personally don't like to give out my social security number to companies that I am just applying to. I don't like anyone to have *all* my vital information, especially companies I don't know that take my information online. We've all seen the stories of the credit companies selling our information that was used by identity thieves and scammers. I make it a rule not to sign up for a company that wants my ssn *before* they accept me as a shopper. I can always give them my social security number *after* I get accepted and get my first job with them. Some companies require a social security number before you can submit the application. If it's a company that you really want to sign up with, give a fake number until you get assigned a job. Then tell them you need to change the number they have on file. Many times you can go online and make changes to your profile yourself. We are independent contractors with these companies so we are responsible for our own taxes.

How Many Jobs Can I Expect to Find Out About?

I initially only signed up to about 20 companies and I got about 4-5 notifications a day. (Keep in mind, I live in a large metropolitan city.) You'll start to receive these notifications immediately, within a day or two of signing up. Some larger companies get jobs every day, others may only send job notifications out once in a while. And where you live makes a difference on the number of notifications you'll receive. The bigger the city, the more jobs available. The more companies you apply to, the more notifications you will get.

It can get overwhelming to go to your email box and see 20 mystery shop notifications. At first it's pretty exciting. But you have to take the time to read over each one, determine if you qualify, (usually) go to a website to read the full description and then apply. This takes time. Let's say it took you just 5 minutes to do it for each one. Multiply that by the number of notifications you received and you can see how that can eat into your day. Base the number of companies you sign up for by the number of notifications you receive. If you aren't receiving enough notifications, sign up to more companies.

This is big. You need to apply *quickly*, as soon as you see a job that you'd like to do. Remember, these notifications go out to EVERYONE on the list in the state, which could have hundreds or thousands of people on it. "The early bird gets the worm", "If you snooze, you lose." Nowhere are those sayings more true than in getting assigned mystery shops. I had been selected to do one of my first mystery shops (a lunchtime restaurant shop - I'll go into why you may or may NOT want to do a restaurant shop later) and it had already been assigned. The scheduler emailed me and asked if I could do the same shop in the evening the next week. I replied that I could, but by the time I replied (the next day) I was too late. It had been scheduled. I once applied for a shop I saw that had been sent to me just 4 minutes prior. There were 12 shops available at the two locations I signed up for (24 shops total) and I didn't get one of them. Now I don't know if it was due to the fact that I'd never shopped for that company before, or that folks had jumped on it that fast. I think it was the latter (it was a desirable shop even though it paid very little). And I believe the people who got them leave their email accounts on all the time so they can 'hear' any new emails coming in. Whatever the reason, you can see why time is of the essence.

Tip: Open up a dedicated email account to accept your mystery shopping notifications. Be sure and only use it for mystery shopping. Also you **MUST** check your email box daily (that includes Saturdays and Sundays), and if you can do it several times a day you'll be better off. (The notifications don't just come in the morning.) If you can't or won't make an effort to check your email at least once a day, don't get involved. For those that are quick, I have some invitations to get a free GMAIL account. It's Google's free email service. Right now it's invitation only. It's pretty neat in that it bundles emails from the same sender together so you can read them at the same time (some companies send more than one type of job notification the same day). And it tells you right at the top of the message how long ago an email was sent so you can determine if you might be too late. It has 2GB of space so you never have to worry about throwing anything away. Just email me and I'll send you an invitation. I only have a limited number so you must act fast. As of this writing, Yahoo is about to bump up their email storage to 1 GB in response to Google's large capacity.

Can I Really Make \$10 -\$60 an Hour and More?

Those stories you hear about the lady interviewed by the Wall Street Journal who made over \$7,000 in a month doing mystery shops (which by the way is the story that *everybody* selling mystery shop info touts and I've been hearing it for years now), or someone who made thousands in just a few months are anecdotes. They are few and far between. And usually the person who was able to accomplish that had many years of experience, did multiple shops in the same day, lived in a metropolitan city and/or did extensive traveling.

You can always find one great story to get people excited about. The problem is that it is usually one of very few real success stories so everyone uses it, even though it wasn't one of their clients. It's an "industry" story and it's a sales tactic. It's like the story of the actress who was discovered at a soda fountain. How many times do you think a producer, agent, casting director, etc. relays that story to young hopefuls? It happened over 50 years ago and it hasn't happened since (to my knowledge). But it gets people excited that maybe they could have that same kind of luck. It doesn't matter if it happens one in a million times. We think, "It still could happen to me." We as human beings are eternal optimists. That's why so many of us play the lottery.

The truth is that you will earn far less money than you hope to. Yes, it is true that you can make \$10 - \$60 an hour doing mystery shopping. But... and this is a big BUT. You may not get more than one job a week or a month for that matter. Those impressive numbers of \$10 or more an hour seem like you can make a decent part time income, especially if you calculate it based on a 4 or an 8 hour day (which most of us do). So even though you may get \$20 to do a mystery shop and it took you one hour, that may be the *only* job you get for the entire month. Doesn't seem so exciting anymore does it? To be fair, if you're the *only* person in your area who applies for these mystery shops, you will more than likely get assigned all of them. But I wouldn't count on that if you live in a decent sized city. You can bet that you have quite a few people in your area competing for the same shops. Remember what I said earlier though, the more mystery shopping companies you apply to the more notifications you'll receive. So if you're not getting enough shops, apply to more companies.

There is a worldwide mystery shopping trade organization that you can join, although it's not mandatory. It's the Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA). If you

intend to do this as a career versus a hobby, it would be in your best interest to join. If you do join, you will get assigned more jobs since many ask for your MSPA certification or rating. As I said, it's not required to be a member and you can do shops without it, but it'll definitely help you get your foot in the door with more mystery shopping companies. This organization issues the ratings that so many mystery shopping companies ask about. There are two levels: silver and gold. It costs \$15 for the silver level to take an online test. You must pass the test with at least an 80% in order to qualify to get "gold" certified. If you fail, it'll cost you another \$15 to take the test again. Gold Certification involves going to a workshop/seminar for \$99 to get your certification.

The reality is that you *might* make between \$50 - \$100 a month when you first start out. If you stick with it, you can make several hundred dollars a month or more by doing multiple shops. The longer you stay with it, the more money you'll be able to make. To make any decent money, you'll need to do multiple shops in a day. I've heard of full time shoppers doing 40 or more shops in one day - which can translate into 16 hour days with NO breaks! If you stick around any length of time, you'll be rewarded with more jobs. The schedulers will get to know you and assign you more and more shops because they know they can count on you. However, if you live in a small town, you may *never* get an assignment. The big corporations may not have any work in your area. In order to get jobs you really need to live in or near a large city or be willing to travel to the large city to do the job.

This leads to another reason people quit the mystery shopping game. There are about a *million* people who sign up to be mystery shoppers a year. And every year, millions more sign up. Why? Because the sad fact is that people drop out. They aren't making

the kind of money that they expected and it's a lot more work than they thought it'd be. So it's like a revolving door with new people coming in to replace the ones that left. If you're looking for a hobby, have at it. If you're looking for a reliable part time income, it may be doable but you're going to have to "work." Some companies offer actual jobs where you take inventory or place products in a store or do regular shops for them on a route. This too is part time and may only be a few hours a month, but in many cases the 'route' may have you shopping 20 or more of the same stores at whatever the rate is. (Ex. 20 stores at \$12 per store = \$240 per route.) I've heard stories of a mystery shop assignment turning into a full time job complete with benefits. I have seen notifications weekly offering merchandising type jobs that include benefits. The pay is just so-so in my opinion (\$10-\$15/hr). But you've got competition for those jobs too - everybody in your area who received that notification too.

Calculate how many shops a month you'll have to do to make the kind of money you want. Base your numbers on the types of jobs that you see in your email box and what they pay. For example, at \$20 per shop it'll take 50 shops to make \$1,000 a month.

Restaurants (Food)...Shop at Your Own Risk

Let me tell you why you may or may NOT want to do a restaurant shop. If someone had revealed this to me, I would most likely never have applied for any restaurant shop. I'm going to be honest with you, most restaurant shops DO NOT pay you any money. You only get a free meal out of it. If they do pay anything, it's generally between \$5 - \$10. Now you may think that getting a free meal for your time is not so bad. Before you make up your mind though, let me tell you what you have to *do* for that free meal.

The first shop I ever did was for a nearby diner. I was allotted \$20 for the meal and would be paid \$7 for the shop. I had to make the normal observations: time the delivery of my meal, time how long it took to be greeted, remember everyone's name who I came into contact with, visit the restroom, etc. But I also had to fill out a 70+ question survey of the shop once I had completed it. Many questions were 'Yes' or 'No' answers, but if you answered 'No', you had to elaborate on why you answered that way. And if your answer wasn't long enough, you had to go back and elaborate some more. You see, I couldn't submit the report until it was done exactly how they wanted it. The website wouldn't accept it. Several of the questions were essay type questions. It took me over an hour to completely fill out the report online, not including the time it took for me to fill it out manually. I had printed out the report beforehand in order to fill it out after I left the restaurant so I wouldn't forget anything.

You are definitely going to have to work for that "free" meal. You have to keep track of times, names, receipt numbers, etc. and you have to do it all discreetly, so as not to blow your cover. If you don't get all the information, you CANNOT go back and get it. You've got to do it right the first time. So you see, there's a little bit of pressure there. It gets easier as you continue to do them but you never know what the company you're doing the shop for is going to want to know.

The \$20 allotment was not nearly enough to eat at this diner, in my opinion. The bill for myself and a guest came to \$19.50 WITHOUT the tip. (They don't want you to do a restaurant shop alone so I invited someone to come with me. How can you invite someone to go along with you and then expect them to pay? Maybe YOU can, but I feel if I extended the invitation, I should pick up the tab. Especially since my guest probably wouldn't have gone otherwise and may be on a budget, and I would eventually be

reimbursed for it.) Back to the story, only one of us had a soft drink and we ordered two of the least expensive items on the menu. The 20% tip came out of my pocket. So I ended up making less than the \$7 pay because it took well over an hour to complete the online form, probably half that amount of time to do it manually *and* I left a \$4 tip. I probably made about \$2 for my time plus the free meal. That \$2 barely covered the cost of gas. (Gas is well over \$3.00 a gallon where I live!)

Fill Out Your Report EXACTLY As Requested or Else!

My report was graded and I got feedback from the scheduler. The meal I received was wrong so I sent it back (I ordered fried chicken and I was brought fried fish.) I was told that I should not have sent the fish back, that I was to evaluate it as it was. Complaining to an employee (about the incorrect order) could cause me to not get paid. I was reminded to write the description exactly as it was given in the survey (ex. I should've written 'Name: [colon] Jane' instead of just writing 'Jane' which I did.) It seems nit-picky to me, but they are the ones paying and the company wants things a certain uniform way. You must stick to the 'letter' when you fill out the report. Mistakes mean no pay. I had done another shop, I spent over *two* hours filling out the report, and it was rejected because I said something wrong during the shop. So all that time for NO pay!

Tip: If you feel that a scheduler or editor has unfairly criticized your report, you can contact them and explain what you meant, make corrections or elaborate even more. (Something else I wasn't told I could do. I thought you just had to grin and bear it.) This helps especially if there is the possibility of your report being rejected and you not getting paid for it. Sometimes it makes no difference though, but you do have that

option.

My guess is that some experienced shoppers ‘fudge’ on their reports in order to get paid (especially for restaurants). (This is my *personal* opinion and I don’t know this for a fact.) Why else would you accept an incorrect order, especially if you’re hungry? And I couldn’t have been the only one who’s ever gotten their order wrong. I’m guessing some less than honest ‘veteran shoppers’ would send it back and just not report it. That way, they can get the meal they want and still get paid. Also, some reports need you to do a phone evaluation before you do the actual shop. If the shop is scheduled for only a few days, I believe that once some vets have been accepted to do a shop, they call before the shop actually starts to get part of the job out of the way. Then they change the date on the report to reflect that they did the call on the correct day. I think editors may do something similar if things don’t match up. (Again, this is my personal opinion and just a guess.)

Tip #2: Here’s a shortcut the pro shoppers use. Save your report to your computer so the next time you do a similar shop you have the answers. Save them in a folder by category. For example: restaurants, retail, apartments, service, etc. Save one report for each. Not every shop is the same of course, but most are very similar. Just make the few changes necessary where applicable. It will save you a LOT of time. And it’ll especially come in handy if you’re doing multiple shops in a day. When I first started out I found that the most time I spent dealing with a shop was in filling out the report/survey afterwards.

How Fast Will I Get Paid?

Something else is the time period in which you get paid...IF you get paid. What! I might

NOT get paid? That's right! If you don't fill out the survey correctly (remember I said that you have to do it *exactly* like they say) your report may be rejected and then you are out of luck when it comes to being paid. Also, many companies pay you the following month after you did the shop. And it can take up to two weeks to process a check for you. For example, let's say I do a shop on March 3rd. I will not get paid on that until April 30 (the end of the next month) and it will probably take another couple of weeks to process and mail out the check. So I may get my check around May 15th for the shop I did back on March 3rd. That being said, if you need the money you're spending to do a mystery shop to pay bills or buy groceries, DON'T do it. Realize that you may not be reimbursed for up to two months. To be fair, some companies are using Paypal now and you can get paid in a couple of weeks. Be sure and read the payment instructions so you know when to expect your money, provided your report gets accepted and approved.

It can be fun to look at descriptions of potential shops. I've seen quite a few where you had to go to an upscale store and buy an item. You had to spend a certain amount of money, between \$100 - \$300. That sounds pretty exciting until you realize that you have to come out of pocket the \$300 *in advance*. You have the option of returning the item after the shop is finished, but a lot of stores in my area don't give refunds anymore, they give you store credit. So spending \$100 - \$300 that I may or may not get back, at an upscale store that I would most likely never visit otherwise, is a risk that I choose not to take. And I would only get paid \$15 - \$20 to do a shop like that. I will only do a shop where a purchase is required if the item is something I actually want or need. Otherwise I won't do it. You really have to weigh out the pros and cons. If you have the spare cash, knock yourself out. In some cases you may get to keep the item you bought. I doubt though that you'll get to keep a \$300 item - maybe a \$15 item but not a \$300 item. I choose shops where I don't have to wait to be reimbursed for the money I spent.

I do shops where I don't have to spend any money up front. That way, if my report isn't approved or I am not able to return the item I purchased, it wouldn't have cost me anything but my time.

There are higher paying shops of course, although I've yet to see one that pays over \$60. And you may eventually get assigned these types of shops, but you have to start small. Chances are you won't get the higher paying shops until you prove that you can do the low paying shops. The higher paying shops generally require more experience, so you've got to get experience first. With higher paying shops (like auto repair, hotel stays or cruises for example), you pay out of your own pocket *first* then wait to be reimbursed. Many times you'll get a partial reimbursement for expensive items or services. For example, you may need to shop an optometrist and are required to purchase a pair of glasses as part of the arrangement. If you decide to keep the glasses, you might get reimbursed for half the cost. So you end up getting a new pair of glasses for half price. That's not always the case, but it does happen sometimes. That's why *every* shop is different.

What's a Fair Wage?

The pay we as mystery shoppers receive is a pittance (in my opinion) for the amount of work you have to do. I know what you're thinking, going to a coffee shop or a department store isn't hard work. And you're right. But being hyper observant and filling out a *very* long survey based on those observations, plus the time it takes to fill out that survey "correctly" (online) using correct grammar, spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, etc. *is* work. I can assure you that it will definitely take you over an hour if you are just starting out. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying. Depending on the

length of the survey and how many ‘explanations’ you have to give, it could take two hours or even more to complete a survey. (Explanations are answers that require you to enter a certain number of keyboard characters in order for it to be accepted. I call them essays because that’s what they seem like to me.) I’m sure some people would resent having to do a lot of work for very little pay. I know I do. I don’t mind working for a fair wage. But in many cases after you crunch the numbers and factor in your expenses (your time, the cost of gas, the wear and tear on your car, etc.), the wage you get ends up being quite a bit less than represented.

The pay is minuscule compared to what the mystery shopping companies receive. And the pay has actually gone down. Most times these companies will receive *thousands* of dollars to do a shop and all you get is a free meal, movie ticket, a few bucks or an inexpensive item out of it. Does that seem fair to you? I know it doesn’t to me. That’s why I specifically don’t do restaurant shops anymore...unless it’s at a restaurant that I would like to visit and can’t afford to go to on my own. Mind you, I have no problem with a company making a profit, that’s the “American Way.” But being a cheapskate is another story.

My Grandfather used to say, “If you pay people very low wages, they’ll steal from you. (That translates into shoppers not answering their questionnaires truthfully.) Whereas if you pay them fairly, they will stay with you and treat you like their own family.” The moral there is: The mystery shopping companies get what they pay for. Fair assessments for fair pay, less than honest assessments for very low pay. I don’t think that the corporations paying these mystery shopping companies are getting what they pay for either. They expect to get accurate assessments and if the mystery shopping company won’t compensate someone fairly, it’s tougher to get that true assessment. So they’re

being shortchanged too.

I know someone (indirectly) who has a marketing company that schedules mystery shops for companies. This woman has become a millionaire from it! I've gone to focus groups for television shows and been paid \$50 - \$75 for about an hour of my time. Imagine if they can afford to pay 200 people \$50 each, the kind of money *they're* getting! The entertainment industry is very rich no doubt, but the same thing applies with major corporations - who are the ones paying for these mystery shops. Mom & Pop shops don't usually have the budget to pay for secret shoppers.

I don't know that every mystery shopping company is incredibly cheap because I haven't applied to all of them. But I found that many of the ones I've worked for are. That's why you have to be selective about the companies you choose to work for. Once you start seeing lots of notifications and start doing shops with various companies, you'll be able to gauge which ones pay well and which do not. Then you just stick with the ones that pay well and skip the others.

I'll let you in on a little secret...

Focus groups are where the better pay is. Focus groups are where a group of people come together to give their opinion on tv shows, infomercials, cigarettes, soft drinks, any number of things. They are much easier than secret shops, there are no lengthy questionnaires, your grammar or writing skills aren't considered, there are no wrong answers and all you have to give is your opinion and your time. The BEST part about them is (aside from being fun)...you don't have to wait to get paid. You get cash or a check (usually made out to 'CASH') as soon as you're done, before you leave the

building. And once you leave the building, you are finished. No long surveys to fill out or follow up emails to send. I've been doing these for several years and have never made less than \$50 for about 1-2 hours of my time. And certain times of the year you'll get called more often.

I once did a mock jury focus group that was an 8 hour affair. They bought us lunch and I got paid \$300 for it. I met a woman who did a 3 hour mock jury and got paid \$200. Mock jury focus groups are just what you think they are. You go in as a representative of an actual juror who hears an actual case. The lawyers from both sides want to gauge the potential outcome of a (multi-million dollar) trial based on the how potential jurors see it so they can adjust their strategies, if needed. Mock juries usually pay at least \$150, from my experience as well as others I've spoken to. The down side to focus groups is that they don't like for you to do them more than once or twice a year for the company. The TRICK is to sign up with *many* companies. Then you do two a year for 5 or more companies and you're averaging a couple a month. Even at that rate, you won't get rich doing focus groups.

Tip: If you've never done a focus group, tell them so. If you have participated in one (even if you participated last week), always say you participated "sometime last year" when they ask you when you last participated. As I said, they don't like people to do them more than once or twice a year. (They don't want jaded people or people coming in with biases.) But since there are so many companies doing this, they won't know you're participating in others.

If you're doing one for the entertainment industry, say that you don't work in the industry and neither does anyone you know (even if they do). I know someone who

went to a focus group for a television pilot and *she* was one of the actresses in the show she was watching!

I've been at focus groups where they needed to fill the group with so many people of a certain demographic that they had people there who'd done a focus group with that same company three weeks, two weeks and even one week before. So *everyone* bends the rules when they need to.

I've got a secret I learned from focus group veterans on how to get paid even if you don't participate in the focus group. Which means you can get called *more* than twice a year. I won't reveal it in this report as it will ruin it for those who are currently using it. But if you want to know what it is, I will reveal it to those that are interested. See "I Hope I've Helped" at the end of this report on what to do and how to get it.

OK, Where's that Free Website You Mentioned?

This is the website that I promised to reveal to you. This is an excellent page that lists hundreds of mystery shopping companies, all approved by their readers (so you don't have to worry too much about those companies that may rip you off.) It also has a page of useful tools you can use (including a shopping log.) They have a Daily Checklist page that lets you check on companies that post jobs on their website daily. They have many forums of interest to secret shoppers as well, including a mystery shopping forum full of current mystery shoppers (from the newbie to the veteran). You can get any and all your questions answered here. And it is... drum roll please... **Volition.com** - Click on the "Mystery Shopping" or "Get Paid" link or go directly to:

<http://www.volition.com/mystery.html> You can sign up for focus groups here too. Be

sure and sign up for the “surveys” as well. You may or may not be interested in doing online surveys. They pay about \$2 (& up) via Paypal (some pay nothing at all but give you the opportunity to win cash or prizes) and can take 15 - 30 minutes to complete. Telephone surveys are also included. I was called to do a telephone survey that paid \$60! So it may be worth your while to sign up just to be notified of phone surveys.

Here are a couple of forums for those brand new to mystery shopping:

<http://pub64.ezboard.com/fmysteryshopping90693frm9>

www.shoppersupport.com/new.htm

www.mysteryshopresources.com

I Hope I've Helped

I've done my best to give you all the information you'll need to make a decision as to whether or not you want to become a mystery shopper. And for those that choose to, I've given you the tips that you'll need to make your experience a profitable one right from the start. You won't have to learn through the school of hard knocks like I and so many others have. I hope you feel that this information has been valuable to you.

Here is the information for those who want to learn the ‘**focus group**’ secret that allows you to get paid even if you don't participate. What that means is, they send you home with a check just for showing up. Pretty nice! I reveal the details in a short report. The report is only two pages long. But it is not the number of pages that you are paying for – it is the “secret” that will allow you to get paid *without* participating. And once you know the secret, there's no “un-knowing” it. The price for the report is only \$10. If you use this at just *one* focus group (I've never seen one pay less than \$50 and they usually pay \$75-\$100), wouldn't it be worth a measly \$10?

You can pay via my **Paypal** account. For those that aren't familiar with how Paypal works, you can go to <http://www.Paypal.com> and send money to anyone with an email address who is signed up with them. You can use your credit card to pay. The link to the "Focus Group Secret" is: <http://tinyurl.com/j284z>

Good Luck and God Bless ~~

Cynthia Alexander

Questions or comments? Email me at: cynthia.alexander@gmail.com

P.S: If you like what I offer in this ebook, maybe you - or someone you know - will be helped by another book I have written. It's called "**The Ultimate Guide to Stop Your Dog from Barking...FAST!**" So before you resort to shock collars, surgery or some other drastic measures that may NOT work. Click here <http://www.stopyourbarking.com> and find out how to stop it...FAST!