

# By Design: Mystery Shopping Design Aligned with Brand Objectives



## Introduction

### Design Process



Mystery shopping is an excellent research tool to determine the performance of customer-facing personnel with respect to sales and service behaviors. Key to a successful mystery shopping program is a well-designed questionnaire, which will achieve your customer experience measurement objectives. Unfortunately, many mystery shop questionnaires fail to position the brand to maximize the utility of the program and its return on investment (ROI).

Well-designed questionnaires are the product of a thoughtful design process intended to maximize their utility and ROI. Without such a process the mystery shop program risks being a rudderless ship with no clear direction.

Research without call to action may be interesting – but in the end, not very informative. The following mystery shop design process has built in call to action elements, which will provide clear direction in terms of identifying customer experience investment opportunities that will yield the highest ROI.

Additionally, the following mystery shop questionnaire design process identifies an overall objective to the customer experience, defines your brand personality, measures alignment of service behaviors to the brand personality, and identifies the service and sales behaviors with the highest potential for return on investment in terms of driving your overall objective for the customer experience.

## Overall Objective of the Customer Experience

**“If you don't know where you are going,  
any road will get you there.”**

- Lewis Carroll



The first step in any customer experience research program is to define the objectives of the customer experience itself. Without knowing the objective of the customer experience it is impossible to build a customer experience around that objective.

Consider the following proposition:

*“Every time a customer interacts with a brand, the customer learns something about the brand, and based on what they learn, adjust their behavior in either profitable or unprofitable ways.”*

<u>Positive</u> Buy More	<u>Negative</u> Buy Less
Complain Less	Complain More
Positive Word of Mouth	Negative Word of Mouth
Less Expensive Channels	Expensive Channels
Loyalty	Less Loyal

These behavioral changes could be positive or negative. For example, customers may buy more, complain less, give positive word of mouth, use less expensive delivery channels, or be loyal customers; or they may purchase less, complain more, spread negative word of mouth, use expensive delivery channels, or be less loyal.

This proposition is powerful. It is the key to managing the customer experience in way that will achieve your overall customer experience objectives. It is the key to a profitable customer experience. It gives customer experience managers a clear objective, defining what you want the customer to learn from, and react to, the customer experience. Ultimately, this proposition serves as a guidepost for every aspect of managing the customer experience – including customer experience measurement.

Defining the overall objective of the customer experience is a fairly simple process. Again, considering the above proposition that customers learn and adjust behavior in profitable or unprofitable ways as a result of the customer experience, ask yourself:

- What is the overall objective of the customer experience?
- How do you want the customer to feel as a result of the experience?
- How do you want the customer to act as a result of the experience?

For example:

- Do you want the customer to have increased purchase intent?
- Do you want the customer to have increased return intent?
- Do you want the customer to have increased loyalty?

The answers to the above questions will serve as guideposts to designing the customer experience, designing an experience which will achieve your customer experience objectives. Again, if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.

They serve as the basis for evaluating every aspect of the customer experience – aligning training, monitoring, incentives and rewards in a coordinated effort to achieve your overall objective.

We call this Key Driver Analysis, an analytical technique to identify which behaviors are key drivers of your overall customer experience objective.

In terms of monitoring the customer experience, the answer to these questions will become the dependent variable in analyzing your customer experience research. Or to put it another way, the variable that is influenced by the specific service attributes of the customer experience. Kinēsis endeavors to understand the relationship of these service attributes to the overall customer experience objective. We call this Key Driver Analysis, an analytical technique to identify which behaviors are key drivers of your overall customer experience objective.

### **An Example:**

To illustrate this, consider the following example: Assume you define the overall objective of the customer experience is increased purchase intent. As part of a mystery shop program to measure and motivate sales and service behaviors, include a question to capture purchase intent...a question like, “Had this been an actual visit, how did the experience during this shop influence your intention to initiate or maintain a relationship with the brand?” This is the dependent variable – the variable used to compare the mystery shop behaviors and attributes to determine the strength of their relationship to purchase intent.

## **Definition of Brand Personality**

**Brands have personality.** Brand personality is how the brand is perceived - a set of characteristics which define the positioning, products, price and the mix of service attributes offered by the brand.

### **Ask yourself, how would we describe our brand?**

I’m frequently surprised how often new clients of Kinēsis cannot answer this question. It should be a simple question, easily answered by any customer experience manager. Even those managers who have a defined set of brand attributes do not know the extent to which their desired brand personality is aligned with the brand personality objective. Managers need to take a dispassionate cold hard look in the mirror with respect to how they are perceived by their customers, and determine if this perception is aligned with brand personality objectives.

Kinēsis has had success helping clients define their brand objectives using one-word descriptions of the customer experience, as well as, drafting a series of statements about the brand objective.

**Adjectives:** Using adjectives to describe your brand is a simple and elegant means of defining how you want the brand perceived. This approach lends itself to measuring alignment to customer perceptions with ease.

**Definition is simple.** Ask yourself, what five or six adjectives would we use to describe our brand? How would we want customers to describe our brand?

For example, let's assume you want your brand to be defined by the following six attributes:

Brand Adjectives

- Professional
- Informative
- Knowledgeable
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Efficient

**Measurement is simple.** To measure alignment of the customer experience to your brand objectives, simply ask mystery shoppers if they would describe the brand in terms of each of the above adjectives.

The extent to which they agree with your list of brand adjectives becomes a measure of the customer experience's alignment to the brand.

**Brand Statements:** The next step in defining the brand is defining it in terms of customer experience brand personalities.

As with the adjectives above, ask yourself how do we want customers to describe us?

Brand Statements

For example, you may define your brand image as the following:

- We are dependable.
- We are accurate.
- We provide prompt service.
- We are willing to help customers.
- We have our customers' best interests in mind.

Again, as with the adjectives, measurement is simple. Simply ask mystery shoppers their agreement with each of the above statements.

The purpose of defining the brand is two-fold. First, to determine the extent to which mystery shoppers feel the experience aligned with the desired brand personality. Second, and perhaps more importantly, identify specific service attributes or behaviors in which investments in improvement will have the highest potential for return on investment in terms to aligning the customer experience to the desired brand personality.

## Behaviors

The only requirement is these behaviors should be objective and empirical.

Once the brand personality has been defined, it is time to consider your behavioral requirements of employees during customer interactions. Come up with a list of behaviors you expect from your customer-facing employees. The only requirement is these behaviors should be objective and empirical.

Ask yourself:

### General Questions

Service  
Behaviors

- When greeting a customer, what specific behaviors do you expect?
- When meeting with customers after the greeting, what specific behaviors do you expect from staff?
- At the conclusion of the interaction, how do you want the representative to conclude the conversation or say goodbye?
- Are there specific follow-up behaviors that you expect, such as getting contact information, suggesting another appointment, offering to call the customer?
- What other specific behaviors do you expect from staff?

### For Sales Interactions

- What needs identification or probing of needs behaviors to you expect? What profiling questions are expected as part of the interaction?
- What behaviors to you expect from employees in terms of demonstrating or recommending a solution (product or service) and explaining its benefits?
- What closing behaviors to you expect? How should employees ask for the business?

## For Telephone Interactions

- What specific greeting/answering behaviors do you expect from employees who answer the phone?
- Is there a specific number of rings in which you expect the call to be answered?
- What specific hold/transfer procedures do you expect (for example asking to be placed on hold, informing customer of the destination of the transfer)?
- During the call, after the greeting, what specific behaviors do you expect from staff?
- At the conclusion of the presentation, how do you want the representative to conclude the conversation or say goodbye?
- What other specific behaviors do you expect from phone representatives?

As a final note, ask yourself, how much variation do you expect in the customer experience? How consistent is it? The answer to this question will guide decisions of sample size, as consistent experiences require fewer shops to accurately measure, while experiences with a wide spectrum of variation require more shops to accurately measure.

Now that we've done the foundational homework to consider overall customer experience objectives, brand definition, and identification of behavioral expectations, we can put it all together into a mystery shop questionnaire.

## Putting it All Together

*Agreement Adjectives:* With a defined overall objective, and brand personality (defined by adjectives and statements), as well as identification of expected sales and service behaviors, all the elements are in place to construct a questionnaire. From this point, questionnaire construction is simple – we’ve already done all the homework. As illustrated below, all that is needed is a little reorganization and question construction:



First, take the adjectives you’ve identified as descriptions of your desired brand personality, present them to mystery shoppers in a list identified during brand definition and ask them which one of these adjectives they would use to describe the experience. The results of which determine the extent to which the customer experience observed during the shop reflects the desired brand personality. We prefer to place these adjectives first in the questionnaire to avoid any potential for bias as a result of completing the balance of the questionnaire. We want to get this measure as fresh in the shopper’s mind before they invest a significant amount of attention to completing the rest of the questionnaire.

We like to program randomization into the online data collection platform so adjectives are presented to the shoppers in random order. This eliminates any order bias, where certain adjectives are selected because of the order in which they are presented.

Additionally, depending on the nature of your adjective list, we like to include a few antonyms to test if any shops significantly fail measuring up to the brand personality. Applying this technique to the list of adjectives identified above:

- Professional
- Informative
- Knowledgeable
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Efficient

We may add two antonyms:

- Rushed
- Mechanical

**Objective Empirical Behaviors:** Behavioral measurement is the core of a best in class mystery shop program. Once the sales and service behaviors have been identified, writing the questionnaire is easy. Simply take the expected sales and service behaviors identified in the behavioral definition process and write a question for each behavior.

Specific

Objective

Empirical

Binary

There are a couple of rules to follow. Make sure each behavioral question is specific, objective, empirical and binary (answered with a “yes” or “no”, was the behavior present, “yes” or “no”). Objectivity is key. We do not want the shopper’s feeling or opinion here. Rather, we just want the shopper to observe if the behavior was present or not. Avoid compound questions, questions where we are measuring two behaviors at once. Each behavior should have its’ own question.

**Agreement with Brand Personality Statements:** Now, it is time to use the brand personality statements. For each of the brand statements, we want to ask the shoppers’ the extent to which they agree with the statement using an agreement scale. Using our previous example of the following four brand statements:

- We are dependable.
- We are accurate.
- We provide prompt service.
- We are willing to help customers.
- We have our customers’ best interests in mind.

We can insert each statement into an agreement question constructed something like this:

To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

“During this shop, the employees I interacted with were willing to help customers.”

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 = Strongly Disagree



These subjective rating scales determine the extent to which impressions of the customer experience are aligned with the brand personality statements.



## Key Driver and Gap Analysis

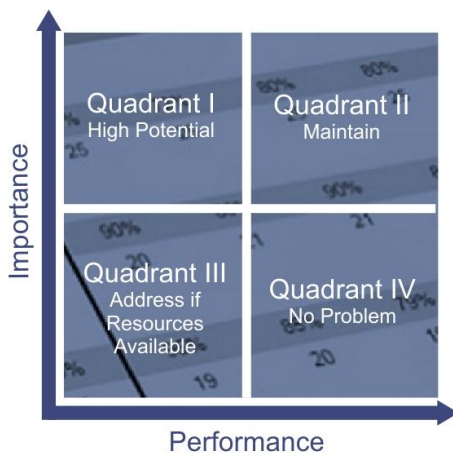
Research without call to action may be interesting but not very informative. One of the benefits of this questionnaire design process is that it anticipates the analysis. An analytical framework designed to identify service attributes and behaviors with the highest potential for ROI in terms of driving your overall customer experience objectives is built into the questionnaire design.

**Key Driver Analysis:** This analytical framework starts with Key Driver Analysis to determine the strength of the relationship of service behaviors to your overall customer experience objective. This is a measure of the importance of each behavior. Those with the strongest relationship to the overall customer experience objective are identified as key drivers of the overall objective.

Going back to our example, where the overall customer experience objective is purchase intent, Key Driver Analysis is a fairly simple process of determining the strength of the relationship of each service attribute and behavior measured to the purchase intent rating (the dependent variable). The strength of this relationship is a measure of the importance of each behavior or attribute in terms of driving purchase intent. It provides a basis from which to make informed decisions as to which behaviors or attributes deserve more investment in terms of training, incentives, and rewards.

Staying with our example, identifying the key drivers of purchase intent is important, but it doesn't get our research to the end goal of providing an informed basis from which to make decisions about investments in the customer experience.

**Gap Analysis:** The next step, Gap Analysis, will use this measure of importance, overlay it with the performance of each attribute identifying those service behaviors and attributes with the highest potential for return on investment.



Gap Analysis plots the importance of each behavior relative to its performance on a 2-dimensional quadrant chart, where one axis is the importance of the behavior and the other is the frequency with which it is observed – its performance.

Behaviors with above average importance and below average performance are the “high potential” behaviors. These behaviors have the highest potential for ROI in terms of driving the overall customer experience objective – purchase intent. These high potential behaviors are behaviors to prioritize investments in training, incentives and rewards. These are the

behaviors which will yield the highest return on investment in terms of driving purchase intent.

The rest of the behaviors are prioritized as follows:

- **Quadrant II** – High Importance, High Performance (Service Attributes and Behaviors to Maintain)
- **Quadrant III** – Low Importance, Low Performance (Service Attributes and Behaviors to Address if Resources Available)
- **Quadrant IV** – Low Importance, High Performance (Service Attributes and Behaviors with No Need of Investment)

This simple, intuitive analysis technique provides managers with a clear call to action in terms of identifying the service attributes and behaviors which will yield the most return on investment in terms of achieving your key objective of the customer experience.

## Conclusion

**“If you don't know where you are going,  
any road will get you there.”**

- Lewis Carroll

Successful customer experience measurement initiatives, from the start, must have a clear direction in terms of its objectives. To be successful, customer experience research must have call to action elements built into them to give managers a clear direction in terms identifying opportunities for return on investment.

This mystery shop design process provides a clear road map for maximizing the return on investment on the mystery shop program.

The mystery shop design process described above provides a clear road map for maximizing the return on investment on the mystery shop program. It identifies an overall objective to the customer experience, defines the brand personality, measures alignment of service attributes and behaviors to the brand personality, and identifies the behaviors and attributes with the highest potential for return on investment in terms of driving your overall objective for the customer experience.

*For more information contact Eric Larse, co-founder of Seattle-based Kinesis, which helps companies plan and execute their customer experience strategies. Mr. Larse can be reached at [elarse@kinesis-cem.com](mailto:elarse@kinesis-cem.com).*