



Mystery Shoppers

customer service specialists

traveline

Case Study

Mystery Shoppers Ltd

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1. The Client

In 2001 the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) in conjunction with the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) had set up a network of Call Centres in response to a Government initiative to encourage the use of public transport by providing easy access to integrated transport information. Members of the public would be able to obtain an itinerary using all modes of public transport for a proposed journey within the mainland UK. The system was designed to provide routings and journey information but not initially fares.

Rather than set up a system from new, they contracted a series of existing local public transport information providers. There were 26 Call Centres in total grouped in 11 regions.

Many of the Call Centres were existing transport operators or local authority travel information lines. There were a number of different enquiry software packages in use and also several different database packages. Most databases had been based on existing local transport databases supplemented by the data needed to cover all transport modes. For example, an existing bus company database may have needed data from other bus operators as well as rail and coach data.

There were no generally agreed service standards.

2. The Objective

To obtain data on the effectiveness of the system prior to public launch and to provide a means of identifying and correcting any issues which adversely affected the advice provided, particularly in respect of:

- impartiality - not favouring any mode of transport over another equally viable one
- accuracy in terms of the practicability of the itinerary offered and the ease of understanding
- accuracy in terms of the appropriateness of the solution to the original enquiry
- courtesy (friendly, polite, efficient, helpful)
- time to call answered
- speed and efficiency of response considering the degree of complexity of the enquiry

3. The Methodology

The initial programme consisted of four phases as follows:

- Pilot programme (300 calls) to validate methodology December 2000 to March 2001
- First Wave (1100 calls) May & Jun 2001
- Second Wave (1100 calls) Sep & Oct 2001
- Third Wave (1100 calls) Jan & Feb 2002

The emphasis was on ensuring the system was capable of providing accurate, impartial, appropriate and complete information to callers. It was designed to test the way various types of call were handled and 'explore the envelope' to ensure that when the system was publicised the longer-distance multi-sector and multi-mode journeys could be handled accurately and effectively. It was not designed to replicate actual call types, call patterns or volumes.

MSL created the scenarios using various existing timetables so that an independent check of accuracy could be made. The Call Reports together with the call tape were then supplied to the Client's nominated Regional Representatives who were invited to comment or challenge the accuracy rating or any other aspect of the report. The aim was to ensure a high level of confidence in the data. Challenges were reviewed by MSL and if felt to be valid the original scoring was amended.

4. The Outcome

A conference of Call Centres was held in late April 2001 at which MSL presented the Findings of the Pilot Programme. The recommendations included creation of a set of Service Standards which were subsequently agreed and used as the basis of subsequent Waves. These were revised in response to feedback following Wave 1 and have been kept under review after each subsequent Wave.

There were a number of key areas where scores were significantly lower than was felt to be acceptable and MSL was able to identify key issues and specific areas causing the weakness so that they could be addressed effectively.

After each Wave a Presentation of Findings was made to a series of Call Centre conferences where actions were agreed to fine-tune the system.

At the end of the programme scores had improved dramatically and were felt to be very acceptable, though still not ideal. We understand that this programme was felt by the DTLR (now DETR) to be one of the most effective it has ever run.

MSL subsequently won the contract for a follow-up programme which is currently in progress. The Client is now the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT).

