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How to Become a Mystery Shopper

Average People Can Make Extra Cash

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GREENVILLE, S.C. -- Wanted: Average people who are willing to get paid to shop and eat at restaurants.

Interested?

If so, you may have what it takes to become a "mystery shopper," a person who poses as a regular customer to see how businesses *really* perform.

"It is so much fun to do this. It is so much fun," said Anita Robertson of Greer, who has been a mystery shopper for two years.

Robertson is a paralegal by trade, but makes money on the side as a mystery shopper. Last year, she pocketed more than \$1,000 "grading" stores and restaurants in the Greenville-area.

"(It's) 100 percent important that I'm just anybody and they have no idea who I am," Robertson told WYFF News 4's Tim Waller. "If they know I'm in there, they're going to try to put on a good appearance. We do not want to have them acting good for me, so I give them an automatic high rating."

A wide range of companies hire and pay mystery shoppers as a way to improve customer service. They include retail stores, restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, auto mechanics, tax preparers, banks, even theme parks.

"It's a way for folks to make a difference with the customer service in their local communities," said Rushton McGarr, Founder and Vice President of Market Force, the mystery shopping company that employs Robertson.

"It's a way to make extra money, and if you get some of the interesting 'shops' that have meals in association with them, you can go out and have a nice free meal as well," McGarr said.

A single assignment pays \$5, \$10 or \$15 depending on the amount of work involved. Robertson said a simple visit to a hamburger joint can yield lots of paperwork.

"Is (the hamburger) is warm, hot, cold, tasty. Is the bread dried out?" Robertson explained. "Are the fries limp, hot or burned?"

Robertson records how long it takes for the food to be delivered to her table. She also takes notes on the cleanliness of the store, including the women's bathroom.

"I have to check the bathrooms to make sure they're fully stocked, they smell clean and that everything's in working order," Robertson said.

If getting paid to eat and shop sounds too good to be true, there is a reason for that. Mystery shopping scams are prevalent these days, offering consumers the opportunity to make "easy money" by cashing fraudulent cashier's checks.

"It is unfortunate there are scammers out there preying on individuals looking for legitimate mystery shopping opportunities," said John Swinburn, Executive Director of the Mystery Shopping Providers Association.

Market Force, based in Boulder, Colorado, offers the following tips on avoiding mystery shopper scams:

Never pay to be a shopper. Mystery shopping companies will not charge you to complete an application.

Only out-of-pocket cash outlays are small purchases associated with the shop (e.g. buying a burger) which are reimbursed.

Although some shopper fees can be higher (e.g. banking shops, higher-end dining, etc.), the typical shopper fee is \$10-20 per shop...be cautious of larger amounts.

Be wary of unsolicited requests to become a mystery shopper sent through the mail or via e-mail.

Avoid companies that require shoppers to be certified -- generally involves a fee which is bad.

Avoid the promise of keeping expensive merchandise.

Avoid the guarantee of getting jobs -- although there are lots of projects, there are no guarantees.

Be wary of the promise it will only take a few minutes.

Anita Robertson was also wary of scams when her son recommended she become a mystery shopper.

"I said, 'I'm not going to do that.' There are so many things out there that are scams," Robertson recalls saying.

But Robertson is proof that legitimate mystery shopping jobs exist for people who seek them out.

"I applied. I was accepted. I went for it," said Robertson. "And I've been doing it almost two years. It's very exciting. It really is."

Links:

[Mystery shopper job search:](#)

[Mystery Shopping Providers Association:](#)

[Market Force \(Robertson's mystery shopping company\)](#)

Avoiding mystery shopper scams:

[Mystery shopper job search:](#)

[Mystery Shopping Providers Association:](#)

[Market Force \(Robertson's mystery shopping company\)](#)

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