

The Optimize Program Exercise Accelerates Sales

Microsoft's Optimize Program is a Secret Shopper service that reveals exactly how a prospective customer experiences a business offering. It uses a 160 point assessment of the customer journey and employs a very carefully constructed persona.

Secret Shopper is the vehicle for a granular, detailed inspection of how calls, emails, website visits and sales proposals are perceived by a typical customer. It means inviting a trusted and competent third party to carry out a no-holds barred systematic analysis of how a chain of technologies, services and people all appear to the outside world.

Getting good value out of sharp observations

Innovative businesses stay ahead by embracing the very latest thinking. That requires a degree of courage. After all, the best ideas often demand the biggest changes. So getting a clear and honest assessment of how a sales process works in practice sounded like a great deal to two growing European businesses, Open Line and Tele-Computing Sweden. They both bear witness to the value of Secret Shopper.

Open Line is a Dutch cloud services business with customers across the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK. These customers all have one thing in common. They need a cloud services provider they can trust. Confidentiality matters enormously to Open Line. More than a quarter of its customers come from the healthcare sector where client confidentiality is at the core of their service. So Open Line must have both a product offering and a mode of operation that leaves no room for doubt.

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Emile Stam, Marketing and Communications Manager at Open Line, recalls the decision to call in the Secret Shopper with some amusement. "This was a great project. And the Secret Shopper title is certainly correct. The person who handled most of the incoming communications from the Secret Shopper never noticed anything unusual!"

Apart from living up to its name, what did the Secret Shopper teach Open Line? "It brought about major changes and minor changes. But some of the little observations had a big impact. For instance, one of the things we were concerned about was the ability of customers to find their way to us over the Internet." Open Line needed a hook, one simple phrase that would guide a potential customer right to the company. Secret Shopper spelt out the right words. These were 'cloud-focused hybrid provider', a term that captures people who are searching around the whole technology ecosystem of the cloud.

Changing the way a business is heard

But this simple phrase was just the start. Secret Shopper demonstrated to Stam that Open Line's entire website was starting off on the wrong foot. It was a highly technical introduction to the company and that was not working for many visitors. "Secret Shopper gave us a new tone of voice" he says.

The objective external assessment of the Secret Shopper led to Open Line maximising the value of its product offering. Microsoft Azure Services, the new and growing family of secure cloud services that Open Line sells, is a tempting proposition for potential customers. Bundling Azure Stack into a trial offer was one of the attractive additions to Open Line's catalogue that grew straight out of the Secret Shopper initiative.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for Stam was the reaction of his own colleagues to the announcement that a Secret Shopper had been working right under their noses.

"To be honest, I had expected a few people to be angry that we had brought in a Secret Shopper. There is a lot of work involved in putting a customer proposal together and people might not be happy to find out all of that work was only for a fictional customer." In the event, his colleagues were fine with the whole exercise. The positive results meant a lot more to them than any regret at working for a carefully constructed prospect that did not really exist!

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TeleComputing Sweden supplies the core IT provision to a wide range of clients. This includes businesses such as Color Line, a ferry company with a 100 year history and growing fleet of vessels carrying passengers between locations in Scandinavia and beyond. Marianne Gade Gorbitz, chief information officer for Color Line, describes how TeleComputing keeps her ships afloat. "We need IT that is accessible and stable. TeleComputing's expertise gives us this plus a much larger technical resource we can lean on when we need to."

Creating a cloud that works for every type of business

The flexibility of the cloud is precisely what TeleComputing and customers such as Color Line desire and expect. Telecomputing can plug users into a powerful hybrid cloud resource that embraces the strengths of Microsoft Office 365 and Azure but which also contains Telecomputing's own private cloud service. Security and rapid delivery of the very latest software updates are the name of the game.

What did Secret Shopper make of this combination? Patrik Lännerberg, Sales and Marketing Manager at TeleComputing sees Secret Shopper as the latest step in the company's rise to becoming a mature, default choice in Scandinavia. One term that figures large in Lännerberg's world today is accessibility.

Lännerberg wanted the Secret Shopper to open his eyes to the perspective of the customer. What Secret Shopper discovered is that every customer wants to get right into the heart of the business as quickly as possible. In other words, TeleComputing had to become more accessible. "Secret Shopper showed us just how accessible we are, and where we had to improve accessibility. It allowed us to measure how we performed from other points of view and also from different points within the buying process."

Among Secret Shopper's many observations were poor SEO results for both Bing and Google but a thumbs up for ease of navigation on TeleComputing's website. Such positive endorsements are every bit as valuable as critical insights.

Lännerberg remembers that TeleComputing's sales team was very pleased at the tips Secret Shopper gave them to introduce a faster and more seamless sales process. The concrete improvements the exercise delivered soon wiped out any objections to the fact that a covert examination had taken place.

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Staff at TeleComputing are now getting more training to ensure they are completely at home with the whole range of benefits Office 365 confers on customers. And those employees are far more confident in their roles says Lännerberg. "This made us all feel that we are modern company.

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Carrying on with a world-class concierge

Secret Shopper transforms the customer journey with a raft of objective observations and constructive criticism. But improvement should be a continuous process.

That is where Microsoft's new Concierge Service steps in. Concierge is a platform of support and assistance available to businesses that have been through the Secret Shopper program. Incorporating New Customer Acquisition Plans and boosted by options for financial support from Microsoft Concierge is just as diligently executed as Secret Shopper and it runs to a tight four week timetable.

Open Line and TeleComputing have both opted to carry on the journey that started with Secret Shopper using Concierge. In the space of one month they have worked hand in hand with Microsoft's own experts to turn best practice into daily routine. Whether it is developing a sales proposal or mapping out a client's migration into the cloud, Concierge will find the ideal route to faster sales and satisfied customers. Getting it right has never been easier. And getting it right is what customers look for in the first place.