

Mystery Shopping: A Good Way To Make Extra Cash

"Mystery Shopping" is a worldwide industry that provides opportunities to make part-time cash simply by evaluating the customer service of various businesses. As a bonus, you can also get free stuff.

Many mystery shopping jobs are available online, thanks to the Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA) at www.mysteryshop.org. This organization requires that its member companies meet a strict code of ethics, which includes treating their shoppers fairly, and paying them on time.

More than 260 member companies worldwide use the service, which includes marketing research and merchandising companies, private investigation firms and training organizations.

Jobs are posted on the mysteryshop.org website, and you can easily search for opportunities that are available in your local area. According to the MSPA, it may take some patience at first to get shopping assignments, but the key is to be persistent and convince the companies that you're reliable.

Jobs usually require you to visit a particular business to evaluate customer ser-

vice. If you're required to make a purchase, this cost is reimbursed, and you often get to keep the product. Depending on what's legal in that state or province, mystery shoppers are sometimes also asked to take digital photos, videos, or record conversations with hidden recorders.

Payment rates vary according to the difficulty of the job, but the amount being offered is clear up front, so you can decide if you want to accept the job or not. The average job pays \$10 to \$20. Some very complex assignments may pay up to \$100. A \$10 job may only take 10 minutes.

Doing this type of "independent contract" work requires good organizational skills and a little computer knowledge. There are hundreds of shopping companies offering work, but you must register for them separately, and they each have different guidelines and instructions.

Once they approve you as a shopper, you'll begin getting emails detailing jobs that are available in your area.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mystery Shopping Providers Association (www.mysteryshop.org).

Yak Grower Finds New Markets

By Dee Goerge Contributing Editor

John Hooper calls himself the Yak-Man. He has observed yaks in their native Tibet and he also has one of the largest herds in the eastern half of North America with between 55 and 60 yaks.

Hooper, a Christmas tree farmer, started his herd almost a decade ago when he went looking for "exotic" livestock to graze his 85 acres near Cold Spring, Minn. He decided on yaks by elimination. Bison and elk require expensive fencing, and he doesn't like the way deer and elk pace in a pen.

"I like to interact with animals," Hooper says.

Hooper did some research and found some yaks in North Dakota, buying his first bull and five cows in 1997.

Hooper admits his first yaks "were a little scary" because they had been raised on a ranch with little human contact. Though smaller than beef cows - cows are 600 to 700 lbs. and bulls 1,200 to 1,500 lbs. - they know how to use their horns. Their defense against predators is to make bluff charges - they charge full speed and stop and turn at the last minute.

The yaks tamed down, however, with regular interaction and physical contact. "In a pasture situation, I feel quite at ease with them," he says. "I even walk through my herd of 20 bulls."

He even rides two of the yaks and also milks his herd to make butter and cheese.

Hooper sells yaks for breeding, meat, hair, and skulls. He also breeds his yaks with Angus and Pinzgauer beef cows. The resulting crossbreeds grow bigger faster and retain yak meat qualities - lean and tastes like beef with a yak flavor thrown in.

He pays a USDA plant to butcher and package the meat, and he sells it frozen at four farmers markets and to a couple of restaurants. Prices start at \$4.50 per pound for ground meat.

"Health conscious people buy it," he says, adding they like to know the meat



Yaks thrive in cooler North American climates, says John Hooper, who sells yaks for breeding, meat, hair, and skulls.

they eat was raised on pasture instead of a feedlot.

Hooper uses rotational grazing on 100 acres of pasture and is impressed with the yaks' hardiness. When he traveled to China as a consultant for Land O'Lakes to help Tibetans improve yak production, he found out how tough yaks are. They are excellent foragers; he puts his yaks on pasture in the spring early, saving about a month's worth of hay. He feeds the cheapest hay he can find through the winter and the yaks do just fine. He supplements with a little oats, mostly to keep them tame, and to look over the herd on a daily basis.

Fencing for yaks is the same as for beef cows. If they get out because a gate is left open, he and his Border collie and Welsh Corgi can easily round them up.

Interest in yaks is growing slowly; there are about 3,000 to 4,000 in North America. That's helped moderate costs. Hooper charges the same for bred yak cows as he paid for them nine years ago - starting at \$2,000. He sells to hobby farmers, who just want something interesting to graze on their pasture, and to people who want to raise yaks for a living.

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BatCones Key To Successful Business

Bat-proofing houses is a business that Jim Dreisecker got into by accident. But he discovered quickly that there's a lot of demand. "There are bats everywhere, and bat-proofing is a great business," he says. "Best of all, it's easy to get into. All you need is a ladder and some information."

With 24 years of experience trapping bats and keeping them out of all kinds of buildings, Dreisecker has learned a lot about bats. He got started as part of his animal control business. People wanted him to keep bats out. That usually meant sealing up homes at night when the bats were gone. Tiring of night work, he realized he needed something that would let bats out at night but keep them from returning.

His BatCone disposable plastic tubes are easily installed over bat exit points. Today he markets three different models through distributors. Prices range from \$9.95 to \$19.95. He also offers professional bat control seminars for \$1,500. However, his main business remains bat-proofing.

"I charge from a few hundred dollars on up, depending on how many points of entry, how many bats and if there is bat guano to be cleaned up," says Dreisecker. "Anyone could use the BatCone themselves, but having to get up on a ladder limits the number of people who can use the product."

Dreisecker's website offers clear directions on how to install a BatCone and the materials needed. It also lists why exclusion is the preferred way to control bat populations and why he likes working with the flying mammal.

"Unlike rodents and other nuisance animals, bats can't chew their way back into their old home," explains Dreisecker. "They are fun to work with, beneficial to have around and easy to keep out."



BatCone disposable plastic tubes are installed over bat exit points.



Dreisecker's website offers clear directions on how to install the different types of BatCones.

In 24 years of working with bats, he says he has never been bitten. He does wear gloves and take precautions since they are known to carry rabies. However, he has had hundreds of them flying around his head in an attic without a single one touching him.

"In Connecticut, we have to have any bat caught in a home tested for rabies," he says. "Of the hundreds that I've tested over the years, only five or six have tested positive for the virus."

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How To Start Your Own "Manufactured" Stone Business

Sara McIntosh of Rubber Mold Company in Carterville, Mo. says there are a lot of reasons why starting a business producing manufactured stone is a good idea. The mold company has more than 27 years of experience making and selling high quality molds that are used to create durable, beautiful and lightweight man-made stone, which is a hot commodity in today's building industry.

According to McIntosh, a low initial investment gets you set up with your own molds, and there are never any franchise or royalty fees.

"No prior experience is required and we can provide full training on how to produce a proven and reliable product," she says. "The best part is that you can make a healthy income with this type of business since there is a shortage in many areas of manufactured stone and builders are having to call upon distant suppliers, which adds to their costs."

Though many think it's just as attractive as natural stone, manufactured stone is more functional and reduces builder costs since there is no need for footings or wall ties to install it. It's made from cement, lightweight aggregate, and pigmentation.

Rubber Mold Company's long history means they have the experience to produce "superior, long-lasting, durable molds," using their custom-blended formula that's strictly proprietary to them.



Molds (above) are used to create beautiful and lightweight man-made stone.



The molds can make stones in a wide variety of shapes and sizes.

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