



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **MYSTERY SHOPPING PROVIDERS ASSOCIATION WARNS CONSUMERS: BEWARE OF ADS PROMISING QUICK RETURNS FOR CASHING A CHECK**

#### *Consumers Around Country Caught By Fake Check Scam*

TOLEDO, February 12, 2008 – A check-cashing scam continues to pop up all across the United States, offering consumers the opportunity to make “easy money” by cashing a large-sum cashier’s check and evaluating the service they receive.

Already, a number of consumers across the country have reported being caught by this scam – everywhere from Tucson, Ariz. and Berkeley, Calif. to Fargo, N.D. and Philadelphia.

The Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA), the largest professional trade association dedicated to improving service quality through the use of mystery shoppers, advises the public to disregard letters or classified ads that promise large sums of cash and expensive gifts by performing simple service evaluations.

The most recent scam asks the consumer to cash a cashier’s check and wire the money back to a specified address, typically outside the country. Then the consumer conducts a brief evaluation of the service received. The “reward” to consumers – they keep a percentage of the original cashier’s check as payment.

In these scams, the cashier’s check bounces several days later and the consumer is held liable for the entire amount of the money they wired to the international address – typically between \$1,000 and \$5,000. MSPA advises the public to be especially leery of unsolicited offers to cash checks and wire funds elsewhere.

“Mystery shopping is a valuable tool that is being used by some of the largest retailers, restaurants and banks to understand and enhance the experience they provide their customers. However, it is not a quick and easy way to make a large sum of money and receive numerous freebies,” said John Swinburn, Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA) Executive Director.

“It is unfortunate there are scammers out there preying on individuals looking for legitimate mystery shopping opportunities,” Swinburn said. “We currently are working with local, state and federal officials to catch these offenders. I would advise the consumer who receives a large cashier’s check in the mail to report it to their local police department.”

Many of the scammers are using names that mirror legitimate mystery shopping companies. These bogus companies even list legitimate Web sites on the materials they send the consumer.

The MSPA advises consumers to visit the MSPA Web site to locate legitimate companies and to be leery of offers that sound too good to be true.

“Mystery shoppers typically are paid modest amounts and on some occasions may receive reimbursement for required purchases,” Swinburn said. “Legitimate mystery shopping companies will never promise large sums of fast cash or require consumers to pay an up-front fee to become a mystery shopper.”

Prospective shoppers looking for legitimate mystery shopping companies can simply visit the MSPA Web site at [www.mysteryshop.org](http://www.mysteryshop.org). There, they can find information on how to register to be a shopper with an MSPA company, what jobs are available in their region, and additional information on the mystery shopping industry.

The MSPA has developed the following tips for those interested in becoming a mystery shopper:

- Visit the MSPA Web site ([www.mysteryshop.org](http://www.mysteryshop.org)) for a list of reputable mystery shopping companies. Contact these companies directly for information on how to become a shopper.
- Be patient. It takes time, sometimes months or even longer, to be contacted with an offer to conduct a shopping assignment.
- Prospective shoppers should not need to pay a fee to become a mystery shopper. If a shopper receives an email or visits a Web site that requests a fee, simply avoid that opportunity.
- If an assignment sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Beware of opportunities to make large sums of money for doing simple tasks, like cashing a check or money order.

### **About Shopmetrics**

Shopmetrics, Inc. was formed in 2004 after its founders saw an opportunity to offer advanced data collection and reporting to the Mystery Shopping and Marketing Research Industries. With offices in both the US and Europe, Shopmetrics is able to support its many clients on 4 continents around the world.

### **About the MSPA**

With more than 200 member companies worldwide, the MSPA has a diverse membership, including marketing research and merchandising companies, private investigation firms, training organizations and companies that specialize in providing mystery shopping services. Its goals are to establish professional standards and ethics for the industry, educate providers, clients and shoppers to improve quality of service, improve the image of the industry and promote the membership to other industry associations and prospective clients.