



Guide to Mystery Shopping & Doing A Local Pricing Survey

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TIP: This needs to feel organic to get the best results. Simply asking your competitor to trade pricing info with you is illegal in many countries. It also only gives you a fraction of the information you are looking for so we recommend taking a different approach.

Price Fixing & Anti-Competitive Behavior

Starting a pricing conversation by looking at your competition is a huge mistake!

Talking to other business owners for the purpose of price fixing is illegal in most countries. Copying other business' prices in lock-step is also considered a form of 'informal price fixing' and is also illegal in most countries.

Gazelle would never recommend that you copy or collude with your competitors. Your pricing formula and strategy needs to be confidential and should be decided before you do any research on the competition. Once you have asked the right questions of yourself and your business, it is time to discover how the story & pricing you provide to your tribe fits in with the stories & pricing your competitors are telling the people in their tribe. New clients are exploring all options and will ultimately decide which 'tribe' best fits with the stories they tell themselves about their piano, their music, and the importance of having a musical instrument in their home.

Mystery Shopping

Mystery shopping your competition is the most comprehensive way of collecting the best data. **There are multiple approaches you can take to get the information you are looking for.**

The most expensive approach is hiring a consumer to hire your competition. The consumer gets a free piano tuning and you get all the information after reimbursing them. This could cost your business \$2,000-\$5,000 so maybe reserve this approach for your top 5 competitors. Another approach is to request consultations on the same piano with repair estimates. This doesn't cost as much as paying your competition to do all the work and still gets you a ton of information. **Or you could have someone simply call around as a prospect client.** This is the most cost-effective because you can give one person a script and a mission and they can call your competition. The Denver Business Journal has [a good article](#) that discusses this topic. Just make sure you are courteous and don't take up more of their time than a typical client lead.



Hire This Out

You cannot effectively mystery shop your own competition because this is a small industry and your competition probably recognizes your phone number, face, and voice. Find someone who has a lot of time on their hands and LOVES research. You can also formally set up a mystery shopping event through a crowdsource consumer service.

Survey Their Website & Read Online Reviews

This is something you can do ahead of time to give the person you hire all the contact info they need. Click through their entire website. Read all of their online reviews. You may find some of the info you are looking for is already public.

Be Systematic In Your Approach

You need good organized data. Ask everyone the same list of questions about the same exact services. Use the script and checklist below as a guide.

This Is About Differences More Than Prices

Take this opportunity to also survey their customer service and product *differentiation*. You are probably going to be priced higher than them, so knowing how they rank on different metrics makes it easier to differentiate where it matters.

You Need To Get Their Hourly Cost

Ask questions that will lead you to ascertaining their hourly cost. If they say, "A tuning is \$X", ask them, "So, about how long does a tuning take?" Also, try to get their extra services hourly cost. This is usually less because it doesn't include a call out fee.

How Do They Compete Against You Directly

Sometimes you can get valuable information about how they position themselves when prodded about your business specifically. Your secret shopper can say "I've been doing research between you and "Your company name", they say pianos that haven't been



tuned in a long time need extra tuning, why is that?" Knowing the prospect is considering a competitor can cause them to change their sales pitch.

Keep It Short and to the Point

Be respectful of their time. Keep all phone conversations below three minutes and then promptly end it with "Ok well thank you for the information, this was helpful. I need to talk to my spouse and I will be in touch."

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Sample Inquiry Checklist

- Did they answer the phone? If not leave a message and email/text.
- How long did it take them to return the inquiry? Which form of communication did they reply to? (Email? Texting? Returned a phone call?)
- Did they answer the phone professionally or informally?
- What did their answering machine or message say?
- If this was your piano, would you have done business with them? Why or why not?
- Rank them 0-10 on customer service. Why did you rank them this way?
- Rank them 0-10 on professionalism. Why did you rank them this way?
- Rank them 0-10 on ability to answer questions. Why did you rank them this way?
- Rank them all in order of overall best to worst. Why did you rank them this way?

Sample Mystery Shopping Checklist

- Did they remind you about the appointment? How? Provide copy of email/text.
- Did they call/text on their way?
- Did they show up on time? Or call if they were running late?
- Did they park in the street or driveway?
- How did they dress?
- Did they smile when you opened the door? Were they happy to be there?
- Did they show respect for your house (shoes, tools, case parts, etc.)?
- Did they offer to clean the piano?
- How long did their evaluation last? How did they start the conversation? You may have the person audio record the information "for their spouse."
- What did they say? Provide a written repair estimate.
- If they did any work, what did they do and how long did it last.
- Did they work diligently?
- Did they use a tuning device, and if so how much did it look like they relied on it?



Sample Sales Inquiry Script

Client: “Hi, I recently acquired a piano and need to get it tuned.”

Tech: Let them answer and direct the conversation...

Client: “So how much does that cost and about how long does it take?”

Tech: Answer and should shift into “educational mode.”

Client: “I recently moved it into this house and I think it has been a few years since the previous owner had it tuned, I read something about it possibly needing a pitch raise and needing to let it sit for a few months before being tuned?”

Tech: (Should go further into “educational mode” -- We are trying give them mildly inaccurate information to see how they address your lack of education on the matter. For example, the piano should sit for a few weeks after moving not a few months.)

Client: “Now I have a few notes that my daughter says are not working right. I think it is C or G right in the middle of the piano and maybe an F# too, are these difficult to fix?”

Tech: (Should go further into educational mode and assure you he will do an evaluation and give you a quote after seeing the piano, he might even quote you a specific rate. You are just trying to bait them into giving you an estimate that gets you their hourly repair costs.)

Client: “Ok, someone else I called said they include small repairs, cleaning, regulation and voicing in their service calls. Is this included in what you just quoted me?”

Tech: (Should be trying to figure out if they are dealing with a price shopper, value shopper, or swing shopper. Note, we have not said whether we “want these other services” just that others provide them. The tech should ask if they want to book the appointment if they know what they are doing.)

Client: “Ok, thank you so much. Let me talk with my spouse and I will be in touch.”

End the call

