



## Introduction to Store Audits

Store audits are a useful way to get an outside perspective on how your store is seen by customers and where you have opportunities to improve operations. Store audits are usually conducted by a team of people with grocery experience who know what to look for and can suggest improvements. Often this team includes managers of other grocery stores or consultants from the grocery industry. They will spend several hours walking through the store, engaging with staff and even shopping. As they proceed, they complete a comprehensive survey document and note both problems and exceptional areas throughout the store. The audit team then meets to compile their individual responses into a report to be shared with the store management. That report will provide a high level of detail as well as recommendations for improvements and changes.

Stores that act to address the audit recommendations can see major improvements in customer satisfaction and sales revenue.

## Store Audits for Future Store Development

Individuals or groups that are creating plans to open a new store or purchase an existing one can also use store audits to inform their business planning. In these cases, the prospective store manager(s) and owner(s) may do the surveys on their own, with the goal of better understanding what makes a store attractive and compelling to shoppers. The stores they review could be similar sized stores in surrounding communities or potential competitors. In the latter case, it will be particularly important to note the ways in which competitors may not be meeting the needs and expectations of your future clientele.

## Deeper Audits

In addition to the basic store operations audit, you can also conduct specialized audits for everything from Human Resources policies and compliance, Finances, Back of the Store functions, and store Branding and Merchandising. The more specialized the area under review, the more likely you will need to hire a qualified professional to provide the service.

## Mystery Shoppers

A simplified version of a store audit can be accomplished by hiring a professional Mystery Shopper. Their job is to act as a regular customer and make note of all the things that impact their shopping experience and perception of the store. Many larger grocery stores contract to have regular visits from mystery shoppers to monitor whether their performance is slipping or improving. The mystery shopper, as the name implies, avoids being recognized as anything other than a regular customer, and even the store manager will not know who they are or when they will be coming in.

## Audit Checklists

The following pages are an example of typical audit worksheets. They can be adapted to whatever departments and services your store offers, and additional sections can be created to look at special issues of concern. It is important that the audit team is composed of people who are not previously familiar with the store being audited. Outside, unbiased perspective is needed to ensure objective results.

# Store Audit

For:

Conducted on:

Audit Team:

## Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				<b>BEFORE ENTERING STORE</b>	
				1. Indicators that this store is different than others, including other natural food stores and supermarkets (e.g., a welcome sign in the parking lot that features the store's best attributes)	
				2. Parking lot and sidewalk cleanliness	
				3. Parking lot maintenance	
				4. Clean and attractive signage	
				5. Store hours clearly posted-- What are they? Appropriate for location?	
				6. Convenient and ample parking	
				7. Exterior lighting	
				Other notes	
				<b>UPON ENTERING STORE</b>	
				1. A natural, warm, comfortable décor; attractive, inviting, positive initial impression	
				2. Clean flooring	
				3. Adequate lighting	
				4. A festive air of merchandising excitement	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				5. Clean, ample, and well-maintained shopping carts	
				6. Ample supply of hand baskets at entry (and throughout the store)	
				7. Indicators that the store is an integral part of the community (e.g., community bulletin boards)	
				8. Personnel who are well groomed and cheerful	
				9. Lobby well maintained, clean and tidy	
				10. Motorized cart available for disabled?	
				11. Service Center? What services are offered?	
				Other notes	
				<b>MERCHANDISING</b>	
				1. Consistent signage department to department	
				2. Consistent colors throughout store (signs, brochures, etc.)	
				3. Themes carried throughout store	
				4. Coherent and exciting end caps	
				5. Availability of brochures	
				6. Appropriate lighting	
				7. Store Brand—is it clear; what image is being presented? (e.g., price, health, food excitement)?	
				8. If store is a co-op is this clear to customers (e.g., they have an opportunity to be an owner?)	
				9. Uniformity and consistency of signage throughout the store	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				10. Effective use of wall space for marketing	
				11. Effective use of cross merchandising	
				Other notes	
				<b>PRODUCE DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. Exceptional variety. Appropriate ratio of organic, conventional, local, etc.?	
				2. Organic indicators or separate section	
				3. Refrigeration temperatures appropriate to product needs	
				4. Staff available for assistance	
				5. Helpful consumer information	
				6. Full, well-merchandised racks	
				7. Freshness, quality product	
				8. Fixtures are clean and have no off odors	
				9. Floors are clean and free from debris	
				Other notes	
				<b>GROCERY DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. A layout that controls foot traffic, to expose shoppers to the maximum range of products	
				2. Logical integration of non-food categories and sub-categories with food products	
				3. Shelf fixture cleanliness	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				4. Feature and promotional price signage that attracts your attention	
				5. Complete and legible product price information	
				6. Acceptable variety for store brand and size	
				7. Well-stocked, well faced shelves	
				8. Customer-friendly feature displays	
				9. Attractive, appropriate shelf set	
				Other notes	
				<b>DELI DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. Immaculate cleanliness standards	
				2. Broad variety of products	
				3. Organized customer service	
				4. Garnishing that makes all products look sparkling fresh	
				5. Friendly, helpful personnel	
				6. A chance to sample unfamiliar products	
				7. Accurate labeling, ingredient lists, use by dates, and allergen warnings	
				8. Merchandising that is appetizing and visually appealing	
				9. Staff are using proper sanitation in dress and handling	
				Other notes	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				<b>BAKERY DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. Clear and appealing signage	
				2. Exceptionally clean display features	
				3. Cross merchandising with other areas of the store	
				4. Good variety in confectionery and staple bagged goods	
				5. Appealing visible preparation area	
				6. Magnetic price features.	
				7. Special décor touches.	
				Other notes	
				<b>DAIRY DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. Immaculate cleanliness.	
				2. Evidence of good product rotation (e.g., open dating not too close)	
				3. Low-fat/lite product options	
				4. Good variety in both dairy and ice cream substitutes	
				5. Staple dairy, egg, and cheese items at competitive prices	
				6. Excellent variety of specialty cheese (or see Cheese if a separate department)	
				7. Colors complimentary to dairy products	
				8. Merchandisers are well faced, with a sensible planogram	
				Other notes	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				<b>BULK DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. Clean and well-maintained bins (free of old labels)	
				2. Well-stocked and ample space for volume movers	
				3. Magnetic price features	
				4. Floor and shelving free from spilled product	
				5. Self-rotating bins or system to ensure freshness	
				6. Clearly marked signs and pricing	
				7. Convenient and ample bags, ties, and scales	
				8. Organic labeling visible	
				Other notes	
				<b>WELLNESS</b>	
				1. Supplements arranged by manufacturer or health concern	
				2. Good Selection, variety	
				3. Shelf and product cleanliness	
				4. Tight shelf sets	
				5. System for pocket coding-freshness	
				6. Well stocked shelves	
				7. Well faced shelves	
				8. Friendly, knowledgeable staff	
				Other notes	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				<b>FROZEN FOODS</b>	
				1. Good Variety	
				2. Tight shelf sets	
				3. Well stocked shelves	
				4. Well-faced shelves	
				5. Correct temperature (juice and ice cream not soft)	
				6. Logical categorization of products	
				7. Cleanliness (shelves and glass)	
				8. Appropriate signage – views not obstructed	
				Other notes	
				<b>CHEESE</b>	
				1. Variety of domestic/staple cheeses at competitive prices	
				2. Variety of imports, regional and specialty cheeses	
				3. Product fresh, rotated and culled as needed	
				4. Information, interesting signage	
				5. Cross merchandising	
				6. Ample stock levels with good product facing.	
				7. Cheese portioned in appropriate sizes for market and type	
				8. Regular sampling opportunities	
				Other notes	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				<b>NON-FOODS (General Merchandise)</b>	
				1. Selection ample for store mix	
				2. Appropriate Signage.	
				3. Ample inventory levels	
				4. Display	
				5. Cleanliness	
				6. Cross Merchandising.	
				Other Notes	
				<b>MEAT DEPARTMENT</b>	
				1. Clean, immaculate	
				2. Lighting adequate and appropriate color	
				3. Product fresh	
				4. If wrapped, wrapping is tight and clear	
				5. Natural and organic options clearly labeled	
				6. Information regarding sources available and clearly visible	
				7. Ample inventory available and good selection	
				8. For stores that cut meat, customer service and knowledgeable staff	
				9. All visible work areas neat and clean	
				Other Notes	

Condition

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				FOR ALL DEPARTMENTS	
				1. High standards of cleanliness, both product and equipment	
				2. Employee courtesy	
				3. Adequate aisle widths; easy shopping	
				4. Merchandise placement for easy shopping/attractive, appropriate shelf sets	
				5. Product locator signage	
				6. Organic, local, other special feature indicators	
				7. People who speak to me	
				8. Support of local suppliers	
				9. Allergens labeled	
				10. Good organic retail practices observed	

## OPERATIONS

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	
				1. POS technology is sufficient for the needs of the business	
				2. Loyalty program or membership data integrated into POS system	
				2. Sufficient number of computers for staff to do their jobs	
				3. Are there in-house IT staff? Nr. of hours devoted to IT?	
				4. Overall systems well-integrated, computers are integrated and data from different organizational functions do not have to be entered in multiple databases	
				5. Efficient time/attendance data collected and used	
				6. Purchasing systems efficiently use available technology	
				7. Overall IT systems are stable and secure	
				Other Notes	
				BACK ROOM AREA	
				1. No odors that can affect the flavor of perishables	
				2. Lighting adequate for efficient work	
				3. Food safety and cleanliness in preparation areas	
				4. Sanitary work methods	

## OPERATIONS

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				5. Efficient work methods. How are loads processed? Is there a staff receiver?	
				6. Level floors and coolers for use of rolling equipment to move merchandise	
				7. Use of pallet jacks, stocking trucks, and tote boxes for efficient handling	
				8. Efficient price marking procedures and equipment, if needed	
				9. Good receiving procedures, verification of correct receipts and product freshness	
				10. Good receiving area security	
				11. Evidence of fire security	
				12. Safe working conditions. Evidence of active safety plan postings for safety meetings, trainings, etc.?	
				13. Back room stock organization for efficient retrieval	
				14. Ban on shopping carts in back room	
				15. Refrigeration equipment on a maintenance schedule	
				16. Clean public restrooms	
				17. Back room appearance enhances customer trust	
				18. Clean work space—no garbage bags or cardboard piles	
				Other notes	

# OPERATIONS

Not Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent	Characteristics	Comments
				<b>STAFF BREAK AREAS</b>	
				1. Cleanliness	
				2. Comfortable chairs/tables	
				3. Teamwork building signs	
				4. Posted policies on employee purchases	
				5. Employee / management communication tools present	
				6. Happy people	
				7. Appropriate labor law posters displayed	
				Other notes	
				<b>LEAVING THE STORE</b>	
				1. Check stand labor utilization	
				2. Short checkout lines	
				3. Efficient and courteous checking	
				4. Bagging or carry-out service offered?	
				5. Proper bagging to avoid product damage	
				6. Segregated bagging of refrigerated items	
				7. Appropriate product merchandising at check stand	
				8. Consumer information at check stand	

**OPERATIONS**

<b>Not Acceptable</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Comments</b>
				9. Check stand neat and clean	
				10. A sincere thank you	

**GENERAL IMPRESSIONS AND OTHER NOTES**

## **Brand Audit Discussion Questions:**

To be discussed by the Store Manager and Audit Team at the start of the audit process:

1. What are your members' and shoppers' price perceptions of the store?
2. What is or defines your store "brand" (image) as you see it?
3. How do the owners/shoppers talk about your store? (and what sources do you have for this?)
4. How does the store talk about itself?
5. As you see it, which department most effectively represents your "brand" to shoppers? Is this the same department that your shoppers would pick? Why or why not?
6. What do are your expectations of your staff in their interactions with shoppers?
7. If you are a cooperative, how is that reflected in your store brand?

MARKETING MATERIALS BRAND AUDIT FORM

TODAY'S DATE:

<b>Criteria:</b>	<b>Rating:</b> <i>Always/sometimes/never</i>	<b>Comments:</b>
In-store Display Ads and other materials		
Consistent Logo Usage		
Consistent Font Usage		
Consistent Color Palette		
Consistent Signature Usage		
Consistent Tagline Usage		
Consistent Editorial Style		
Consistent Style of Graphics/Images		
Consistent Tone of Voice		
Consistent Messages		
Use of promotional support media		
Use of promotional branding		

PROPOSED CHANGES:

CUSTOMER SERVICE BRAND AUDIT FORM

TODAY'S DATE:

(please note dept and staff names if possible)

Criteria:	Rating: <i>Always/sometimes/never</i>	Comments
Adheres to employee dress policy		
Clearly identifiable as a staffer (wears name tag and apron if provided)		
Greet every customer in a friendly manner when first making contact		
Consistently answers phone giving correct store or department greeting		
Speaks to customers on the phone in a friendly manner		
Proactively offers assistance to shoppers in aisles, at counter, or at register		
Proactively engaged with customer while at register or counter		
Understands return policies and can communicate them effectively		
Can effectively answer customer questions, or actively seeks help if uncertain of answers		
Consistently thanks customers and asks them to return in future in a friendly manner		

Comments

PROPOSED CHANGES