IRF TRUSTED MARK
THE INTERNATIONAL RETAIL FORUM SETTING **'CUSTOMER CENTRIC'** STANDARDS IN RETAIL

TRUSTED MARK® CERTIFICATION SCHEME

Trust 205 – Mystery Audit Manual

Revision History

Version	Effective Date	Description of Revision
1.0	20.12.2016	Original publication
2.0	25.11.2020	COVID-19 protocols incorporated
3.0	28.11.2022	COVID-19 protocols withdrawn and enhanced hygiene and safety requirements incorporated
4.0	19.07.2026	Minor revisions
5.0	03.08.2026	Comprehensive revision incorporating updated customer-centric requirements, Mystery Audit Guidelines and Certification Body Audit Guidelines, and alignment with the revised IRF TRUSTED MARK® Certification Scheme

Scheme Owner:
IRF Trusted Mark LLP

Trusted Mark Secretariat

S 61A, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi - 110 020 India

Ph: +91 11 40525000 F: 011-40525001

Email – rsroy@irftrustedmark.org

www.irftrustedmark.org

MYSTERY AUDITOR'S QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

(To be reviewed before commencing every Mystery Audit)

Section	Key Requirements
1. Objective	Evaluate the customer experience by observing, interacting with and, where applicable, purchasing products or services as an ordinary customer without revealing the Mystery Auditor's identity.
2. Audit Methods	**MO – Mystery Observation:** Observe customer-facing facilities, products, services, processes and employee behaviour without unnecessary interaction. **MI – Mystery Interaction:** Interact naturally with employees or customer service personnel to evaluate customer service, product knowledge, professionalism and customer-centric practices. **MS – Mystery Shopping:** Purchase products or services under normal customer conditions to evaluate the complete customer journey, including billing, payment, fulfilment and after-sales services. **MD – Mystery Digital Assessment:** Evaluate websites, mobile applications and other digital customer touchpoints through observation, navigation, interaction and digital transactions as an ordinary customer.
3. Guiding Principles	Behave as an ordinary customer • Remain objective and impartial • Do not disclose your identity • Avoid arguments or confrontation • Maintain confidentiality • Record only factual observations.
4. Customer Journey	Wherever practicable, evaluate the complete customer journey from discovery through enquiry, selection, purchase, payment, fulfilment, after-sales support and customer feedback, as applicable.
5. Objective Evidence	Retain objective evidence wherever practicable, including invoices, payment receipts, packaging, product labels, brochures, photographs (where permitted), screenshots, website pages, order confirmations, delivery confirmations and customer communications.
6. Assessment Principles	Assess only personally observed facts • Avoid assumptions and personal opinions • Support findings with objective evidence wherever practicable • Record **NA** where applicable with justification.
7. Customer Interaction	Ask only natural customer questions • Avoid technical or regulatory questions unlikely to be asked by ordinary customers • Complete multiple assessments during a single customer journey wherever practicable.
8. Purchases	Purchase only the minimum quantity necessary • Retain invoices and supporting evidence • Follow Mystery Audit Agency instructions regarding reimbursement.
9. Professional Conduct	Do not coach employees • Do not influence responses • Do not disclose audit findings • Do not accept gifts or favours • Do not intentionally create situations that would not normally arise during a genuine customer interaction.
10. Reporting	Complete the Mystery Audit Report immediately after the audit while observations remain fresh • Use factual language • Support findings with objective evidence wherever practicable.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Manual is to establish a uniform methodology for planning, conducting, reporting and evaluating Mystery Audits under the **IRF Trusted Mark® Certification Scheme**.

This Manual provides the principles, requirements and guidance for evaluating the extent to which an Organisation consistently delivers customer-centric products, services and customer experiences in conformity with the applicable requirements of **Trust 150 – Standards for Retailers**.

The Manual is intended to promote consistency, objectivity, impartiality and reliability in the conduct of Mystery Audits across all retail and service categories covered under the Trusted Mark® Certification Scheme.

---

2. Scope

This Manual applies to all Mystery Audits conducted under the **IRF Trusted Mark® Certification Scheme** for Organisations seeking certification against the applicable **Trust 150 – Standards for Retailers**.

The category-specific Mystery Audit requirements are contained in the following documents:

Available Category Standards

- **Trust 205A.1** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Fashion (Apparel, Footwear, Sportswear, Watches & Accessories – Single Brand Stores, Multi-Brand Stores & Department Stores)
- **Trust 205A.2** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Food & Grocery (Supermarkets, Grocery Chains & Gourmet Food Retailers)
- **Trust 205A.3** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Hypermarkets
- **Trust 205A.4** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Lifestyle (Home Décor, Leisure & Luggage)
- **Trust 205A.5** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Consumer Electronics & Telecom
- **Trust 205A.6** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Consumer Durables
- **Trust 205A.7** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Beauty & Cosmetics
- **Trust 205B** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Spa
- **Trust 205C** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Salon
- **Trust 205D** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Care (Gyms, Fitness Centres & Healthcare Services)
- **Trust 205E** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Restaurants
- **Trust 205F** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Cineplex
- **Trust 205G** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Funzone
- **Trust 205H** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Pharmacy
- **Trust 205I** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for Jewellery
- **Trust 205J** – Mystery Audit Guidelines for e-Shop

This Manual applies to physical stores, digital commerce platforms, mobile applications, websites, omnichannel retail operations and other customer touchpoints included within the scope of certification.

---

3. Objectives of the Mystery Audit

The objectives of the Mystery Audit are to:

- evaluate the Organisation's conformity with the applicable customer-centric requirements specified in the relevant Trust 150 Standard;
- assess the actual customer experience under normal operating conditions from the perspective of an ordinary customer;
- independently verify the extent to which the Organisation consistently delivers its customer commitments;
- identify opportunities for improvement before the Certification Body Audit;
- provide objective evidence to support certification decisions under the IRF Trusted Mark® Certification Scheme;
- strengthen customer confidence by promoting continual improvement in customer-centric products, services and experiences; and
- complement the Certification Body Audit by evaluating customer-facing activities that are best assessed through direct customer observation, interaction and transaction.

The Mystery Audit is intended to evaluate customer experience as it is actually delivered and not merely as documented by the Organisation.

---

4. What is a Mystery Audit?

A Mystery Audit is an independent assessment conducted from the perspective of an ordinary customer to evaluate customer-facing products, services, facilities, digital platforms and customer interactions without prior notice to the Organisation.

The Mystery Audit is conducted by a competent and authorised Mystery Auditor in accordance with the requirements of **Trust 203 – Competence Requirements for Mystery Auditors**.

During the audit, the Mystery Auditor behaves as an ordinary customer and evaluates the Organisation through observation, interaction and, where applicable, the purchase of products or services to determine conformity with the applicable requirements of the relevant Trust 150 Standard.

Depending upon the scope of certification, the Mystery Audit may include physical, digital or omnichannel customer journeys.

Unlike a Certification Body Audit, which primarily evaluates documented systems and implementation processes, the Mystery Audit evaluates the customer experience as it is actually delivered during normal business operations.

---

5. Guiding Principles

Every Mystery Audit conducted under the IRF Trusted Mark® Certification Scheme shall be based on the following guiding principles.

5.1 Customer Perspective

The Mystery Audit shall always be conducted from the perspective of an ordinary customer.

The Mystery Auditor shall not behave as an inspector, regulator, consultant or technical expert.

5.2 Independence and Impartiality

The Mystery Auditor shall remain independent, impartial and free from conflicts of interest throughout the audit.

Personal opinions, preferences or assumptions shall not influence audit findings.

5.3 Objectivity

Audit findings shall be based solely on factual observations, customer interactions, transactions and objective evidence obtained during the audit.

Assumptions, speculation and personal interpretations shall not be recorded as audit findings.

5.4 Authentic Customer Journey

Wherever practicable, the Mystery Audit should evaluate the complete customer journey, including:

- discovery;
- enquiry;
- product or service selection;
- purchase;
- payment;
- fulfilment;
- after-sales support;
- complaint handling; and
- customer feedback,

as applicable to the scope of certification.

The Mystery Auditor shall avoid artificially separating customer interactions into isolated audit activities where the entire customer journey can reasonably be assessed during a single visit or transaction.

5.5 Professional Behaviour

The Mystery Auditor shall conduct the audit courteously, professionally and ethically at all times.

The Mystery Auditor shall not intentionally provoke employees, create abnormal situations or influence the Organisation's normal operating practices.

5.6 Confidentiality

Information obtained during the Mystery Audit shall be treated as confidential and shall be used solely for certification purposes in accordance with the requirements of the IRF Trusted Mark® Certification Scheme.

5.7 Evidence-based Assessment

Audit findings should, wherever practicable, be supported by objective evidence such as invoices, receipts, product labels, photographs, screenshots, customer communications, digital transaction records and other relevant documentary evidence.

5.8 Technology-neutral Assessment

The Mystery Audit evaluates customer outcomes rather than the specific technology used to deliver them.

Whether customer interactions occur through physical stores, websites, mobile applications, social commerce platforms, artificial intelligence, chatbots or other digital channels, the assessment shall focus on the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the customer experience delivered.

Declaration by Mystery Auditor

I declare that this Mystery Audit was conducted independently in accordance with **Trust 205 – Mystery Audit Guidelines**. The observations recorded in this report are true to the best of my knowledge and are based solely on my observations, interactions and transactions undertaken during the audit.

Mystery Auditor Name	______________________
Signature	______________________
Date	______________________
Location	______________________