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Exploring Opportunities Unknown

July 29, 2019

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Shh! This Mailbag Is Full of Secrets



RYAN
COLE

Dear Reader,

Well, that got you excited.

A couple weeks ago, one of our topics really grabbed your attention. So much so that it's forced my hand...

We received such a large response — with much enthusiasm — that I simply had to address it in a special mailbag issue.

So let's get started. Once again, these are your questions — answered.

We'll kick things off with the question that's burning up our inbox right now...

Sign Me up for the James Bond Shopping Experience!

I am a 62-year-old healthy male who has traveled (and lived) extensively around the world, mostly for work. I very much enjoy the variety of food and cultures evident in different countries and have wondered why I have not kept a journal of my incredible experiences.

I am also a trained auditor and can offer constructive criticism of various travel, hotel, food and ancillary services, having experienced most of what airlines, hotels and restaurants can and should offer — value for money.

I would love to learn how I could be a part of a constructive research project for business chains wishing to improve their diverse line of hospitality services.

— Kerry F.

I would like to try the secret shopper program; however, there are so many scams where you end up paying out of your pocket. Please show me how to get started.

— Pearl W.

We are interested. Let us know how to get started.

— Ray M.

Kerry, Pearl, Ray — and everyone else who wrote in with similar thoughts and questions — you got it! I'm glad that secret shopping (also known as mystery shopping) has piqued your interest.

And why wouldn't it? Who wouldn't like to [get paid to live a luxury lifestyle?](#)

But it can be intimidating to get started when you don't have any experience. Especially since — as Pearl points out — there are scammers out there who like to take advantage of the exciting lifestyle secret shopping offers (even if you only do it once a month).

So here's a simple, easy way to get yourself going.

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Rule 1: Never pay anything. If a site or company wants to charge you for entry into their secret shopping program, it's a scam. Full stop. If there is ever the suggestion that you'll need to pay money to the company down the line, walk away. (Paying money in a shop, and getting reimbursed later, is different and usually legit.)

Rule 2: Watch out for too-good-to-be-true promises. Yes — secret shopping can lead to an all-expenses-paid, two-week cruise around the Bahamas. But only after you've proven yourself.

If a site is immediately talking about sending you to Bali, that's a red flag. If, on the other hand, they want you to start with a trip to Jiffy Lube, that's more likely to be on the level.

The glory opportunities will come — but they're almost always reserved for shoppers who have already proven themselves reliable. After all, no cruise company wants to give away thousands of dollars in travel to a shopper who won't deliver the goods.

Rule 3: Find one–three reputable mystery shopping companies and stick with them.

As I mentioned in the article, if a company is a member of the [Mystery Shopping Providers Association](#), you're good to go (there's a company search page on their website).

If you just want to go straight to the source, a few of the most reputed organizations include [BestMark](#), [GBW](#), [Secret Shopper](#) and [IntelliShop](#). All of those are highly regarded — indeed, I’ve used Secret Shopper and IntelliShop myself.

There are plenty of other good companies out there. Some specialize in certain industries like banks and credit unions. Some are only in the U.S.; most are international. Some are entirely local to a particular region.

When in doubt, you can always google “[Company Name] scam” and see what comes up. A negative review here or there is inevitable, but a mountain of offenses should become apparent for truly bad actors.

Whatever you do, never pay a secret shopping company money... be cautious giving out your information before you trust the company... and start slow and simple before working your way up to the big fish.

But also, get started today. This little side hustle is too much fun — and too lucrative — not to get involved. Save the money you would have spent on that fine dining experience or that cross-country trip and invest it in the profitable assets we cover in these pages every day.

Speaking of...

Collectors Unite!

Your website interested me. What I do is collect interesting things. I buy what I like. This has led me to fill my home to the point that I am running out of room. I enjoy the hunt.

I am 83 years old. I have been doing this since I was in my 30s. I live in south Florida, where there are many places to look for things.

Maybe we can start an organization to provide a forum for people who collect.

— Martin F.

Good news, Martin — you don’t need to wait for anyone to invent such a

forum. Because it already exists!

Our friends over at [JustCollecting](#) have dedicated a corner of their website to reader comments, blogs, thoughts and questions. Anyone can join in the discussion. And you can talk about practically any subject — as long as there's a collecting connection.

We often highlight JustCollecting's [best-in-class stamp offerings](#), or their extensive network of [rare, investment-grade, international coins](#).

But that's just a fraction of what JustCollecting covers... Everything from medals to meteorites, action figures to watches.

If you collect it, there's someone on JustCollecting's website who wants to talk with you about it — no matter what collections you've got filling your home (which I'd love to hear more about).

And that goes for all our other readers out there as well.

That's all the space we've got today... There are a number of other questions waiting for answers, so if I didn't get to yours yet, don't lose hope.

And keep your queries coming! We'll have another mailbag soon.

Unconventionally yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Cole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" and last name "Cole" clearly distinguishable.

Ryan Cole
Editor-in-chief, *Unconventional Wealth*

P.S. Want to hear more about little-known, fun and interesting income streams you can participate in? Have one that you've been doing and you think the rest of us would enjoy? Can't believe you're finally going to get the chance to send in stories — and photos — of your own collections? We take it all at feedback@unconventionalwealth.com.

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