

## **shopkick: Customer friendly? Not quite.**

*After applauding shopkick's revolutionary, smartphone-based, coalition loyalty program, my attention now turns to four niggling issues using it...*

by Fiona Woolf (August 10, 2013)

Using shopkick is an explorational process. The company's website and app do not provide an explicit account of the program, impelling members to learn about its unfamiliar aspects through experience. In my experience using shopkick, there are four aspects that currently stand in the way of it being truly customer friendly:

- Registration stipulation
- Confusing lingo
- App interface
- App complications

### **Registration stipulation**

After using the app and earning kicks (ie, points) from partner retailers, I was taken aback when it came time to register: a key requirement is linking shopkick to your Facebook account. This stipulation came as a surprise because shopkick touts itself as being a *shopping-based* app that integrates social features, in contrast with *socially-based* apps that integrate shopping features (eg, FourSquare, Facebook's "Deals"). Although anyone can download shopkick's free app and begin to earn kicks, only registered members can earn unlimited kicks, redeem rewards and receive special offers.

Requiring members to register to receive rewards is typical of loyalty programs; requiring members to register by linking the program to a social media account is not. Yet this is what shopkick does, and it is annoying for two reasons: first, I had no warning of this closed-shop stipulation; second, it is irritating that it is a requirement rather than an option. The bottom line: no Facebook link, no shopkick membership.

## **Confusing lingo**

shopkick has contrived its own lingo, starting with coining the term *kicks* to denote *points*. Its one-of-a-kind words and expressions are a creative way to set the program apart, but the meaning of these terms is not always obvious. Without a glossary of its lingo to reference, the meaning of words like “build-up” and expressions such as “unlock a double instant surprise kicks booster!” is not initially apparent.

## **App Interface**

Getting started with shopkick is not, in my opinion, a simple and straightforward process. From my personal point of view, the app interface is not entirely intuitive. The in-app tutorials mostly flip through the app’s pages to spotlight built-in features and new additions to the latest version; disappointingly, the tutorials did not furnish additional information to what I came across from tapping around on the app to become familiar with its contents. This lack of up-front instructional guidance and detailed help with troubleshooting problems can diminish interest in taking advantage of this unique program and its reward opportunities.

The app could also include more features to make it user-friendly. For instance, it is missing a search tool that allows you to type in a partner retailer’s name and view its available opportunities to earn kicks. Instead, you have to navigate through a number of in-app pages to locate a specific retailer’s listing.

## **App complications**

The occurrence of technological glitches and unforeseen obstacles is not uncommon when trying to use the app. Listed here are three issues I encountered:

- **Server crashes**

On a number of occasions, the attempt to open the app prompted the message: “Oh no. Something is up with shopkick servers. Try back in a bit”. This is particularly frustrating when it happens in-store, trying to complete a walk-in or scan, use a retailer coupon or make a purchase.

- **Scan errors**

Prospective members should be aware that completing designated actions to earn kicks (particularly scans) alongside in-app browsing can be time-consuming, and may take up a portion of your data plan besides wearing down your smartphone’s battery. When wandering around partner stores to complete scans, for instance, I left the app open the entire time. I wanted the list of products to be at my fingertips so I could refer to it and readily tap on the item to activate the camera to scan.

In addition to this, I found a few impediments to completing scans:

An attempt to...	Impediment encountered
Figure out what product to scan	<p>Items designated to scan have only the name of the product and a thumbnail image that does not allow for enlargement; as a result, determining the exact product to scan is not always easy.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> When confronted in-store with a vast array of L’Oreal hair color lines in similar packing, it took a few minutes to determine the correct L’Oreal hair color line to scan.</p>
Locate the product in-store	<p>Not all retailer locations carry (or have in-stock) products designated for scans.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Target’s Greenville, SC location did not stock <i>Simply Naked Moscato Chardonnay</i> to scan for 25 kicks.</p>
Scan the product’s barcode	<p>Attempts to scan the correct product’s barcode are not always successful.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Despite repeated efforts to scan <i>Microsoft Office 365 Home Premium</i> at Best Buy in Greenville, SC, the app would not recognize its barcode to complete the scan for 50 kicks.</p>

I generally found that the amount of time it takes to complete a scan (figuring out the product to scan, locating it in-store and scanning its bar code) outweighed my perception of the benefit (ie, number of kicks awarded).

On average, a single scan earns members 5 to 50 kicks. The minimum number of kicks needed to redeem a reward is about 500, which usually equates to a \$2 gift card at shopkick’s Rewards Mall. Conversely, walk-ins and purchases at designated retailers are simpler and more convenient than scans, and also yield more kicks.

- **Bonus Sets**

I also experienced a setback trying to scan bonus pieces to complete a Bonus Set. [For more information on shopkick bonuses see [\*\*shopkick: Where Award Opportunities Keep Appearing\*\*](#).] After collecting all three bonus pieces in the *Smores* Bonus Set: Kraft Jet-puffed marshmallows, Honey Maid graham squares and Hershey’s Milk chocolate 6-pack, I went to Wal-Mart to scan all three bonus pieces to complete the Bonus Set for 70 kicks.

Once I located each product in-store, I tapped on its corresponding bonus piece to activate the camera. Nothing happened. Despite different repeated attempts, I could not activate the camera to scan any of the bonus pieces. Likewise, the same thing happened at Target. I located all three Planters peanut flavor bonus pieces and attempted to scan them to complete the *Planters Peanut* Bonus Set for 5 kicks, but I was unable to activate the camera.

These failed endeavors may be due to either a technological glitch or me inadvertently omitting a step to scan a bonus piece. Either way, I was unable to ascertain (on the company website or in-app) instructions specific to completing Bonus Sets. Consequently, I ceased paying attention to the in-app Bonus Board that lists bonus pieces to scan in order to complete Bonus Sets.

### **Closing Considerations**

To me, these are the aspects that may influence how members view shopkick and, in turn, their future relationship with the program.

While there are problems to resolve, like server crashes, reaction to shopkick continues to be good.

Those who have the patience to try something new and really run with the program will see immediate benefits and be able to treat themselves to a variety of attractive rewards.

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## **About the author...**

Fiona Woolf, a graduate of the University of Virginia, specializes in market research.

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