

MANAGING MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE MICROBUSINESSES

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Abstract: Strategy management is crucial to the success of any organization, including microenterprises, as it guides changes and facilitates decision-making, addressing challenges to survive or remain in the market. The objective of the research is to identify the marketing strategies of a microenterprise providing services in Escuinapa, Sinaloa, Mexico. The study was conducted as a qualitative case study of a microenterprise and was descriptive in scope, collecting data through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. The results indicate that the management of marketing strategies for the growth of this microenterprise, providing domestic refrigeration services with thirteen years of experience, initially included advertising its services through traditional media, maintaining contact with its customers. It also expanded the offer of new services and rewarded loyal customers with a discount program, 24/7 customer service, and off-season promotions. In another phase, they used Facebook and WhatsApp to organize contests with regular customers and new users through referrals. The conclusion is that microbusinesses manage both traditional and digital strategies, increasing services and ensuring customer service. To survive or remain in the market, microbusinesses must implement effective strategies focusing on differentiation, innovation, adaptation to customer needs, and efficient resource management.


Keywords: management, marketing strategy, microbusiness

JEL Classification: M10, N8, L10

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Introduction

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) have become the backbone of economies as a driver of innovation and economic growth. As a source of employment, they generate more than 50% of employment worldwide (World Bank, 2025).

MSMEs represent more than 99.8% of businesses in Mexico. Their sociocultural elements reflect the country's diversity and wealth, contribute to economic strengthening, promote regional development, generate 52% of the income and employ 27 million people. Their distribution throughout the territory is diverse, with SMEs dedicated to commerce concentrated in the southern region and industrial activities in the north (Table 1).

Table 1. MSMEs in Mexico

MSMEs	Income	Employment
99.8%	52%	27 million

Source: (INEGI, 2019)

The diversification and differentiation of their products represent one of their strengths, which, when marketed, allow them to support families and communities. The most significant sectors of economic activity in which Mexican MSMEs operate are: retail trade (5 out of 10), services (4 out of 10), and manufacturing (1 out of 10). Commerce is the predominant activity, however, as company size increases, the manufacturing sector also grows, achieving greater participation among medium-sized companies (See Table 2 and Figure 1).

Table 2. MSMEs by size, employees and establishments in Mexico

Size	%	Employment/people	Establishments
Micro	95	1-10	4,500,000
Small	4	11-50	190,000
Medium	0.08	51-250	38,000

Source: (INEGI, 2019)

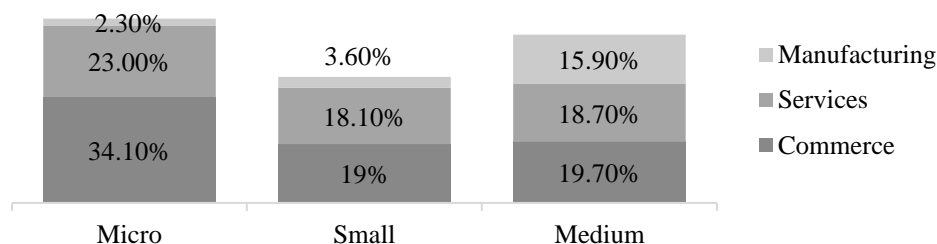


Figure 1. MSMEs by size and sector

Source: (INEGI, 2019)

Building effective marketing strategies for SMEs is essential for growth, competitiveness, and sustainability in today's dynamic business environment. Given challenges such as limited resources and market reach, careful marketing planning can significantly improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall company performance (Oklander et al., 2024).

Effective marketing strategies increase customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Research shows that a tailored marketing approach which addresses customer needs, leads to better results. In competitive markets, a market-oriented strategy helps SMEs respond to customer feedback, adapt their offers, and innovate, which is crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage (Ngo, 2021).

Furthermore, marketing strategies must align with overall business goals to support the company's mission. For example, when expanding into new markets, effective marketing communications combining traditional and digital methods help reach diverse customer segments (Sathana et al., 2019).

This study examines the marketing strategies of a family-owned microenterprise providing refrigeration services. Operating for thirteen years, the company combines traditional and digital marketing techniques, including loyalty programs and social media marketing, to achieve growth despite limited resources.

The study addresses a significant knowledge gap as research on service microenterprises in Latin America is predominantly quantitative, neglecting the wealth of qualitative experiences. This qualitative analysis provides deeper insight into the factors that influence the growth of these firms, such as those related to marketing, pricing, and production control, allowing an understanding of the context that has been neglected by purely numerical approaches.

The article consists of four sections: introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, and empirical results, along with conclusions relevant to similar organizations.

Theoretical overview

Challenges to microenterprises in the changing environment

Understanding the characteristics of microenterprises helps define their role within organizations. In Mexico, the Official Journal of the Federation (2009) defines microenterprises as those employing up to 10 employees in the industrial, commercial, and service sectors, with a maximum annual turnover of 4 million pesos (MXN) and a maximum total turnover of 4.6 million MXN.

Microenterprises operate in complex, rapidly changing environments, facing numerous challenges that limit growth and sustainability. Key obstacles include limited access to capital, technology, and market information. Tiwari et al. (2024) highlight that in developing countries like Nepal, fluctuations in resources and market demand perpetuate poverty among microenterprises. Cui et al. (2013) note that women-owned microenterprises face additional health and economic barriers, requiring multifaceted support. Technological gaps also limit growth; Kpossilande et al. (2020)

demonstrate that many women lack access to advanced technologies that could improve productivity and product quality, making it difficult for them to meet the needs of urban consumers.

Limited participation in international markets is another challenge, exacerbated by trade barriers and a lack of knowledge. Khoiri et al. (2024) and Rahman et al. (2017) emphasize that SMEs face financial and information constraints, complicating international expansion. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, especially for rural microenterprises, exposing a digital divide that limits the adoption of digital tools necessary for resilience (Räisänen & Tuovinen, 2021). Furthermore, limited financial inclusion limits access to funds needed for operations and growth (Tita & Opperman, 2023).

The specificity of service businesses

Service businesses rather deliver intangible value through experiences and solutions. Their production and consumption are inseparable, requiring direct customer interaction, which creates unique challenges in quality control, customer satisfaction, and strategy.

Dinh and Thi (2012) highlight the growing role of service design and innovation, promoting collaborative models based on shared information. Cheng et al. (2014) emphasize that innovative service models help firms gain a competitive advantage. Delivering high-quality service is crucial for customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Customer-centric approaches are vital in competitive sectors like banking and hospitality. Lingga and Sembiring (2021) stress meeting customer expectations and building trust, while Ramli (2023) confirms the link between service quality, trust, and brand loyalty. However, as Antony et al. (2004) note, service quality is subjective and hard to measure.

Key dimensions such as reliability, assurance, and empathy shape customer perceptions (Parasuraman et al., 1985), and managing these well ensures satisfaction and long-term success (Fabian et al., 2024). Responding to globalization and sustainability, Özbekler and Öztürkoğlu (2020) argue for integrating environmental and social practices to enhance competitiveness. Kett (2011) adds that digital technologies and integrated service engineering are transforming services into strategic, market-oriented solutions.

Service businesses range from professional firms like consultancies to personal services such as salons (EBC, 2024). Kotler and Armstrong (2017) note that they sell intangible offers that do not transfer ownership but provide customer satisfaction, requiring adaptable management with a focus on the human element.

Marketing strategy and its importance for microenterprises

Marketing strategy is essential for microenterprises to survive and grow in competitive markets. With limited financial and human resources, these businesses need clear strategies to gain visibility and differentiate themselves. Saiyed et al. (2023) highlight entrepreneurial marketing as crucial for improving small craft businesses, especially in emerging markets.

Flexible marketing strategies help microenterprises adapt quickly, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Zaidi et al. (2023) show that adaptive approaches and simple management help small businesses stay competitive and find new customer channels.

Digital tools offer affordable promotion and direct engagement. Grisales Castro & Hernández Torres (2023) emphasize social media as effective marketing channels, while Cajamarca-Ramos et al. (2023) note e-commerce's role in expanding customer reach and sales with low investment.

Marketing strategies must consider local and sector-specific contexts. Ngenoh et al. (2020) illustrate how small agricultural enterprises tailor marketing to local consumer habits and distribution challenges, overcoming typical structural constraints.

Strategic planning aligns marketing with microenterprise goals. López-Lemus et al. (2021) argue that even very small firms benefit from structured planning integrating marketing with mission and vision.

Nuño De León (2012) defines strategy as an action plan based on small enterprise realities. In microenterprises, strategy often emerges informally through everyday decisions, as Mintzberg (2005) and Mintzberg et al. (1997) suggest, highlighting strategy as an evolving learning process shaped by experience. Kotler and Keller (2008) describes marketing as a value exchange focused on selecting a market, offering suitable products, and using cost-effective promotion.

Methodology

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study of a microenterprise providing refrigeration services located in the municipality of Isla del Bosque, Escuinapa, in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico. The qualitative approach served as the central methodological framework, enabling an in-depth understanding of the organizational context through a theoretically and methodologically grounded case study design. This approach facilitated an interpretive analysis of the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders, aimed at capturing the organizational reality of the microenterprise studied.

Case study was used as the research strategy to understand the phenomenon based on its intensive explanation (Becker, 1979); on in-depth analysis and examination (Hamel, 1992); and addressing the microservices enterprise with 13 years in the market that faces changes in revenue, personnel, office closures and openings, among others; gradually transforming itself, considering the actions of its entrepreneurial manager who implements strategies focused on customer needs and satisfaction.

The analysis was holistic, encompassing individual and organizational life cycle events as well as administrative processes to understand the dynamics of the applied marketing strategies. Considering the fact that the research questions focus on how and why certain phenomena occur, the case study was justified in exploring complex processes and causal mechanisms (Yin, 1984), reflecting patterns of strategies identified in comparative analysis with similar studies in Latin America and challenges characteristic of the sector.

Data collection included semi-structured interviews with the company owner and two employees. Additionally, direct observation of daily organizational activities was conducted, supplemented by analysis of internal company documents. Field visits to the organization provided rich empirical data, allowing the researcher to observe practices and processes in a natural work environment.

Following the triangulation practice proposed by Yin (1984), for whom “the sole strength of a case study is its ability to address a variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations,” offering valuable insights for the theory and practice of service microenterprises, laying the groundwork for future research and the formulation of applicable recommendations. Yin (1984) points out that the single-case design is justifiable when it represents a critical test of an existing theory; and it is valuable when it meets the criteria of confirming, expanding, or challenging the theory, in this case, the theory of marketing in microenterprises.

Case study

The MSME sector in the state of Sinaloa is a key component of the state's economy. There are 137,583 economic establishments (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, INEGI, 2023), of which 92.6% are microenterprises, 7.2% are SMEs, and 0.2% are large companies (see Table 3), 43.8% of the establishments belong to the services sector, 41.5% to commerce.

Table 3. Companies by size and establishments in Sinaloa

Size	%	Establishments
Micro	92.6	127,402
Small and medium	7.2	9,906
Large	0.02	28

Source: INEGI (2023)

In Escuinapa, Sinaloa, MSMEs play a crucial role in the local economy, in sectors such as commerce, services, and agriculture; they constitute more than 90% of economic units (INEGI, 2023).

According to IMSS records (2021), primary activities such as agriculture and fishing, in addition to commerce and related services, predominate in Escuinapa. Although MSMEs are well represented, challenges include access to technology, training, and financing to improve their competitiveness. The study was conducted in a microenterprise founded in 2012 in the entrepreneurial vision of the family, offering domestic refrigeration services such as the maintenance, repair, and installation of equipment, generators, and smart home devices.

It started with the owner as the sole employee, serving around 50 clients and keeping manual records in notebooks. In 2014, due to growth, it hired its first assistant and expanded its service offer with the sale of Mini Split equipment. By 2019,

it had added more services, such as plumbing and billing, and opened its first warehouse, generating an increase in its client base (230). In 2022, it opened a traditional office for personalized service, equipment displays, and the addition of smart home configuration, increasing its monthly customer base to 300 clients. It currently serves 380 clients and is centrally managed by the founder, who handles all the service processes.

One of the traditional marketing strategies that the company uses is pricing, since it focuses on determining the monetary value of the service, including production factors, competition and the value perceived by the customer, with the purpose of generating profitability by establishing low prices with the objective of quickly attracting a large client portfolio, gaining a market share and in this way generating profits. The director opts for this strategy, arguing that “we have been 13 years in the market and since we started, and until today, we have maintained the same price in the maintenance and installation service.” Ferrell et al. (2012) argue that “When customers see that all competing products offer the same features and benefits, their purchasing decisions are driven primarily by price.” However, an effective strategy should consist of differentiation when offering services and thereby establishing prices different from the competition because currently cost differentiation may not be enough to stand out, as Galaviz et al. argue (2013) “Price and cost approaches are not sufficient against the monsters that face the shelf inventory, especially in the mass consumer goods market.”

The company purchases merchandise during periods of low demand to take advantage of low prices, guaranteeing equipment availability at the start of the service demand season, offering competitive prices, benefiting from cost optimization, ensuring equipment availability, and its supply with a margin of negotiating power. This strategy not only improves the competitiveness of the service company but also allows it to offer more attractive prices to its customers, maintaining a constant flow of inventory without setbacks.

Likewise, another marketing strategy is the promotion of guaranteed services, as the director argues: “A job with us is always guaranteed; any issue that occurs with the equipment, the guarantees are attended to promptly, at no cost,” this with the benefit of offering customers added value and satisfaction, seeking to ensure their loyalty. In this regard, Ferrell et al. (2012) mention that “third-party evaluations and service recommendations are not as dominant as tangible goods, making it difficult to obtain a good evaluation. One way companies address this issue is by providing satisfaction guarantees to customers.” In this regard, guarantees function as a strategic marketing tool, allowing the company to differentiate itself from the rest, representing security and trust to customers, and offering support in case of dissatisfaction or product failures.

Another strategy is introducing new products and services to their portfolio, taking into account customer needs. This is based on the company owner's belief in seeking differentiation from the competition. According to Ferrell et al. (2012), “key themes in product strategy relate to the introduction of new products, whose development and marketing are a vital part of a company's efforts to sustain growth and

profits over time.” They also argue that product line breadth is an important marketing strategy as it allows companies to cover diverse market segments by offering multiple options within the same category. Each product or variant within the line is designed to meet the specific needs of different types of customers, which helps maximize consumer reach and satisfaction.

For its part, the recognition program strategy that the service company follows has allowed it to retain its customers since its foundation and the addition of new ones, thanks to word-of-mouth advertising that customers themselves generate, providing them with exclusive benefits, making them feel unique and prioritized, offering them services 24 hours a day, seven days a week and exclusive discounts, which encourage recurring purchases. Estrada et al. (2014) maintain that “recognition programs may be simple, but they have the ability to foster user loyalty and also word-of-mouth advertising,” and Ferrell et al. (2012) state, “the simple truth is that customers will maintain relationships with companies that best meet their needs or solve their problems.” Thus, the combination of recognition and benefits has managed to position the company throughout its 13-year history, demonstrating that seemingly simple, yet well-established strategies generate loyalty and growth.

In addition to the constantly offered promotions, the marketing strategy is based on offering services with preferential prices on holidays and relevant events to encourage the hiring of services and increase sales, with the goal of attracting new customers. To this end, special discounts or service packages are designed with visually attractive material that reinforces the promotional message. This tactic not only generates an increase in demand during low sales seasons but also encourages greater interaction between the customer and the company. As Ferrell et al. (2012) point out, this approach corresponds to mass marketing, which “is a non-profit approach. Differentiated marketing assumes that all customers in the market have similar needs and desires that can be reasonably satisfied with a single marketing program.”

Likewise, they promoted their products through the radio. However, they have left that medium behind due to customer disuse. The director explains: “we have been innovating together with the people, we changed to advertising and promotion strategies on social networks such as WhatsApp statuses, Facebook and new platforms that emerge; we try to be there,” hence this evolution in marketing strategies reflects an adaptation to changes in the consumption habits of their target audience and to technological trends, trying to be present with their public, as Ferrell et al. (2012) point out “changes in the use of the media and the availability of new media establishments have forced companies to rethink the way they communicate with potential customers” since currently consumers are more informed and more critical. As Estrada et al. (2014) point out “social media is truly playing an important role in creating a connection between consumers and businesses; as a result, consumers have become more demanding regarding the information, products, and services they receive.”

Table 4 summarizes the main marketing strategies implemented by the microenterprise, presenting their specific actions, objectives, observed outcomes, and theoretical links.

Table 4. Marketing strategies, objectives, outcomes, and theoretical links

Type of Strategy	Specific Actions	Objective	Observed Outcomes	Theoretical Link
Traditional – Pricing	Stable, low prices maintained for 13 years	Attract a broad customer base quickly; gain market share	Built trust, customer loyalty, and market recognition, but limited differentiation	7P – Price: pricing as competitive tool; RBV: stable pricing as a unique resource signalling trust
Traditional – Advance Purchasing	Buying equipment in low-demand periods	Reduce costs and ensure product availability	Improved competitiveness and stable inventory supply	RBV: efficient use of resources to secure advantage
Traditional – Service Guarantees	Post-sale warranty and free repair for any issue	Build trust and signal reliability	Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty	SERVQUAL – Reliability/Assurance: reduces uncertainty; 7P – Process: strengthens service delivery
Traditional – Product/Service Diversification	Expanded from refrigeration to plumbing, smart home devices, and billing	Meet emerging customer needs; differentiate from competitors	Growth in customer base; higher service portfolio value	7P – Product: portfolio expansion; RBV: leveraging innovation and capabilities
Traditional – Recognition Program	Loyalty discounts, 24/7 service, exclusive offers	Retain clients and encourage repeat purchases	Strong customer retention and positive word-of-mouth	SERVQUAL – Empathy: personalized attention; 7P – People: customer focus
Traditional – Seasonal Promotions	Discounts during holidays and low-demand periods	Increase sales during slow periods	Attracted new customers; boosted short-term demand	7P – Promotion: targeted campaigns; RBV: adaptive use of limited resources
Traditional – Local Media Advertising	Radio advertising (later abandoned)	Reach local target market	Initial visibility, but declined as media habits changed	7P – Promotion: traditional communication channels
Digital – Social Media	Marketing Use of Facebook and WhatsApp for contests, promotions, referrals	Engage with customers, attract new ones	Increased visibility, broader reach, and stronger customer interaction	7P – Promotion: digital channels; SERVQUAL – Responsiveness: quick interactions with clients

Source: Summary based on case study

Marketing strategies in Latin American microenterprises: similar studies

Analyzing ten studies on Latin American microenterprises, these studies show widespread adoption of WhatsApp and Facebook as basic digital tools and predominant platforms, acknowledging that they lack formal strategic planning.

Reliance on traditional word-of-mouth marketing was also identified as the most valued strategy, highlighting the importance of personal relationships in the context of service microenterprises. This finding confirms that relationship strategies are essential for customer loyalty and acquisition in this segment, with critical gaps such as 80% without a website, 75% without a presence on Instagram/TikTok, and a limited ability to measure the impact of advertising investment.

The findings show that Latin American microenterprises operate in a hybrid environment where traditional and digital strategies coexist, requiring adapted theoretical frameworks that consider limitations in economic and technical resources, social capital, results measurement with simple indicators, and cultural adaptation to local contexts.

The hybrid marketing management model represents a viable alternative for microenterprises with resource constraints, demonstrating that effectiveness does not depend exclusively on technological sophistication but on consistent value delivery and building lasting customer relationships.

The case study of the services microenterprise shows the coincidence in the use of the same options as the Latin American microenterprise, although with the implementation of differentiable strategies (24/7, personalized attention, price stability for a decade, focus on a specific niche and early diversification of its offer), evidencing personal branding. Salas and Solanilla (2018) mentions that “individuals need to stand out above other competitors, highlighting the personal image that is intended to be built and projected as a factor that can become crucial when achieving work success,” creating actions to project a reliable image, with personal strategies to position themselves in their market, differentiating themselves from their competition with their own designs focused on their clients.

Conclusion

The case of this thirteen-year-old microbusiness providing services demonstrates how marketing strategies adapted to the local context and limited resources can drive business growth. The organization has implemented a model that combines traditional and digital strategies. Its stable pricing policy for over a decade, advanced purchasing to optimize costs, post-sale warranties that generate trust, and recognition programs that foster loyalty through exclusive benefits stand out.

The company has evolved from radio advertising to social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook, demonstrating its adaptability to technological changes. Its diversification reflects an understanding of the market. Seasonal promotions and a focus on personalized interaction, despite being a microenterprise, highlight that in the services sector, the human factor is irreplaceable and is enhanced by digital tools.

This case confirms that seemingly simple, yet well-executed and context-adapted strategies can build resilient brands in the competitive services market. In an increasingly competitive and constantly evolving technological environment, the results of this research demonstrate that the success of a microservices company does not lie solely in having large audiences or budgets, but rather in the ability to adapt, innovate, and connect with their customers by implementing marketing strategies tailored to the current situation. The microenterprise's experience reinforces the importance of a comprehensive and flexible marketing strategy as a central element in the sustainability and growth of this type of business, recognizing that managing marketing strategies, such as creating a unique value proposition, is an opportunity to build a strong brand presence.

This case study provides in-depth insights but is limited by its focus on a single microenterprise, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The specific local context and small sample size may influence the applicability of results to other settings. Additionally, the study primarily considers marketing strategies, without extensive exploration of other organizational factors.

For microentrepreneurs, marketing strategy research involves identifying market opportunities, understanding customer needs, making informed decisions for service development, improving market segmentation, reducing risk, and creating a sustainable competitive advantage through pricing, promotion, and customer service strategies.

The theoretical implications of research on microenterprises are that they enrich and adapt preexisting conceptual frameworks (such as those of management, entrepreneurship, or economic development) to the specific reality of these businesses, revealing the need for new models that address their specificities in terms of innovation, digitalization, talent management, sustainability, financing, as well as local and global socioeconomic impact.

The methodological implications for case studies include the need for depth and contextual detail to understand complex phenomena, the flexibility to integrate qualitative and quantitative techniques (triangulation), and the rigor to ensure validity and reliability across multiple data sources and researchers. Furthermore, a well-executed case study will foster theoretical, non-statistical generalizations and strengthen or weaken existing theories, contributing to both scientific knowledge and practice.

Future research could expand by examining multiple microenterprises across different industries and regions to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal studies could track how marketing strategies adapt over time. Incorporating customer perspectives and quantitative data would also deepen the understanding of marketing effectiveness and business sustainability.

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Authors' Contribution: Equal participation in the preparation.

Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure: This research received no external funding from public or private institutions.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest.

Ethics Declaration: No ethical clearance was required for the research.

AI Declaration: AI tools were used solely for grammar and style review, without influencing content creation or data analysis.

ZARZĄDZANIE STRATEGIAMI MARKETINGOWYMI DLA USŁUGOWYCH MIKROPRZEDSIĘBIORSTW

Streszczenie: Zarządzanie strategią ma kluczowe znaczenie dla sukcesu każdej organizacji, w tym mikroprzedsiębiorstw, ponieważ kieruje zmianami i ułatwia podejmowanie decyzji, stawiając czoła wyzwaniom związanym z przetrwaniem lub utrzymaniem się na rynku. Celem badania była identyfikacja strategii marketingowych mikroprzedsiębiorstwa świadczącego usługi w Escuinapa, Sinaloa, w Meksyku. W badaniu zastosowano podejście jakościowe i opisowe, gromadząc dane za pomocą wywiadów częściowo ustrukturyzowanych, obserwacji i analizy dokumentów. Wyniki wskazują, że zarządzanie strategiami marketingowymi na rzecz rozwoju tego mikroprzedsiębiorstwa z trzynastoletnim doświadczeniem, świadczącego usługi chłodnicze dla gospodarstw domowych, początkowo obejmowało reklamę usług w mediach tradycyjnych i utrzymywanie kontaktu z klientami. Rozszerzono również ofertę nowych usług i nagradzano lojalnych klientów programem rabatowym, całodobową obsługą klienta i promocjami poza sezonem. W kolejnym etapie wykorzystano Facebook i WhatsApp do organizowania konkursów ze stałymi klientami i nowymi użytkownikami poprzez polecenia. Wniosek jest taki, że mikroprzedsiębiorstwa zarządzają zarówno strategiami tradycyjnymi, jak i cyfrowymi, zwiększając zakres usług i zapewniając obsługę klienta. Aby przetrwać lub utrzymać się na rynku, mikroprzedsiębiorstwa muszą wdrażać skuteczne strategie skupiające się na różnicowaniu, innowacyjności, dostosowywaniu się do potrzeb klientów i efektywnym zarządzaniu zasobami.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie, mikroprzedsiębiorstwo, strategia marketingowa

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