Alternative Marketing Strategies Used by Microenterprises During Lockdowns

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Abstract

Lockdown restrictions did not merely reduce demand; they broke the ordinary route by which customers discovered, evaluated, purchased, received, and repurchased from microenterprises. This strategic review examines alternative marketing as the redesign of that route rather than a shift to social-media promotion alone. Evidence available through 2021 is organized into four operating jobs: making the offer discoverable, reducing uncertainty, completing a low-friction transaction, and fulfilling safely and reliably. The synthesis shows why tactics that generate attention may fail when payment, inventory, delivery, or customer recovery is weak. It also considers low-technology strategies such as neighborhood resellers, pre-order schedules, product bundles, and shared delivery. A minimum viable marketing system is proposed for resource-constrained firms, together with measures tied to orders and repeat business rather than likes. The article is a conceptual review and does not claim performance data from particular enterprises.

Keywords: microenterprise; lockdown; digital marketing; order fulfillment; customer retention

Introduction

For many microenterprises, marketing before the pandemic was embedded in place. Customers saw products while passing a stall, asked questions face to face, paid in cash, carried purchases home, and returned through habit. Lockdown restrictions separated these steps. A business could post frequently online and still lose sales because customers could not confirm stock, transfer payment, or receive an order.

Alternative marketing should therefore be evaluated as an operating route from discovery to delivery. Promotion is only the front end. The route also includes trust, ordering, payment, inventory, fulfillment, after-sales response, and repeat purchase. This perspective is especially important for owner-operated firms in which one person may perform all these jobs.

Purpose of the Article

The review asks which practical strategies repaired each step, why common digital tactics failed, and what a small firm could measure with limited time and cash.

Conceptual Approach

Design and Source Base

The article synthesizes early pandemic literature and institutional reports on small-firm continuity, digital transformation, e-commerce, and work disruption published through 2021. Sources were coded according to the customer route they addressed: discovery, confidence, transaction, fulfillment, and retention. Recommendations were retained only when their resource assumptions could be stated.

This is not an effectiveness comparison. Firms faced different restrictions, products, cash positions, customer locations, and delivery infrastructure. The purpose is to reveal operating logic and tradeoffs that can guide local testing.

The Customer Route

Job One: Be Discoverable in a Narrow Market

During lockdown, broad reach was often less useful than reachable demand. Microenterprises used Facebook pages and groups, messaging applications, community pages, online marketplaces, resellers, and customer contact lists. The strongest offer usually answered immediate questions: What is available today? What area can be served? What is the minimum order? When is the cut-off? How will the product arrive?

A simple product board can outperform a stream of decorative posts when it shows current price, portion or specification, availability, delivery area, payment options, and ordering format. Consistency matters because customers learn where the authoritative version appears. Posts that circulate without dates create avoidable disputes after price or stock changes.

Job Two: Reduce Uncertainty

Customers who cannot inspect a product rely on signals. Clear photographs, dimensions or serving sizes, ingredients, return rules, business location, seller identity, and recent customer evidence reduce perceived risk. For food and other time-sensitive products, preparation and delivery windows are part of the offer.

Live selling and chat can restore some interaction, but they consume owner time and data. Repeated questions should be converted into a concise catalog or pinned response. Trust is also damaged when sellers accept orders before checking stock or promise delivery times outside their control. Honest limits are a marketing asset during disruption.

Job Three: Make the Transaction Small and Clear

Every extra message between interest and confirmed order creates abandonment. A standard order template - item, quantity, location, preferred time, payment method, and contact number - reduces error. Confirmation should state the total, any delivery fee, payment status, and realistic fulfillment window.

Cashless payment widened options but introduced fees, transfer mistakes, and fraud risk. Some customers still needed cash on delivery. A practical system offered a small number of clearly explained methods and a procedure for verifying payment without asking customers to expose sensitive information in public comments.

Job Four: Redesign Fulfillment

Marketing cannot be separated from fulfillment when movement is restricted. Pre-order schedules allowed firms to aggregate demand before buying or preparing stock. Bundles simplified choice and increased the value of each trip. Fixed delivery zones and cut-off times reduced route uncertainty. Neighborhood resellers or pickup points brought products closer to customers, while shared delivery allowed several businesses to spread transport cost.

Each arrangement shifts risk. A reseller needs clear pricing, unsold-stock rules, and responsibility for product handling. A shared rider needs route coordination and proof of delivery. Prepayment improves cash flow but raises the importance of cancellation and refund rules. The strategy is sustainable only when these responsibilities are explicit.

Job Five: Recover and Retain

A delivery problem is costly, but silence after the problem is worse. Microenterprises can use a simple recovery rule: acknowledge quickly, verify the issue, offer a proportionate remedy, record the cause, and change the process when the problem repeats. The owner should distinguish a marketing promise failure from damage caused after handoff to a third party, while still helping the customer reach a resolution.

Retention can be low technology. A permission-based customer list, reminder of the next order day, refill or reorder message, and accurate record of preferences may generate more value than paid reach. Consent matters; contact details collected for delivery should not automatically become an unlimited advertising list.

Table 1

Minimum viable marketing route

Customer job	Low-cost tactic	Operational measure
Discover	Dated product board; community or reseller channel	Qualified inquiries
Trust	Clear specs, limits, location, and current evidence	Questions resolved; cancellations
Order and pay	Standard order form and confirmation	Inquiry-to-order conversion
Receive	Zones, cut-offs, bundles, shared delivery	On-time and complete orders
Return	Recovery rule and permission-based reminders	Remake rate; repeat purchase

Note. The table is an analytic tool proposed in this article; it does not report field measurements.

Discussion

A resource-constrained firm does not need to join every platform. It needs one current offer board, one order channel, one confirmation format, one fulfillment schedule, one payment record, and one problem log. The system should be tested on a small route before expansion.

Scope and Research Agenda

Measures should follow the customer route. Relevant indicators include inquiries that become confirmed orders, average order value, cancellation rate, on-time fulfillment, refund or remake rate, and repeat purchase. Likes can indicate visibility but do not show whether the route works.

Conclusion

This review does not quantify the prevalence or profitability of any tactic. Pandemic studies were produced under rapidly changing rules, and strategies suitable for food, services, and durable goods differ. The enduring lesson is operational: alternative marketing succeeds when attention, trust, transaction, and delivery are designed as one system.

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