

BEST PRACTICE IN MICROFINANCE

FULM Savings House, North Macedonia: Digital tools for MFIs

This case study presents key learnings from an EaSI TA tailored training on digital tools and channels, delivered for FULM Savings House.

Objectives: The aim of the EaSI TA tailored training was to acknowledge, discuss, and start implementing the most suitable digital techniques and solutions for FULM Savings House. It was organised to address the staff's request to support them in expanding their knowledge on digital tools to improve the services and communication with their clients.

The main objective was to present theoretical knowledge, deliver several sample case studies and engage all the participants in a group work to test out digital sales techniques in action. The results were shared in a live discussion at the end.

Outcomes of the training: Major achievement of the conducted tailored training was the outline of a customised action plan, to be implemented by FULM Savings House by expanding the number of distribution channels through altering the technical side of their digital communication via specific customer data platforms, such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or digital archive systems.

Long-term results: Based on the outcomes of the training, FULM Savings House will develop a new digitalisation strategy for 2021-2026.

In addition, several opportunities for the improvement of their existing and new services were proposed:

- Enhancing usage of social media platforms, such as Facebook, to expand the clients' outreach and number of distribution channels to promote the latest products and services of FULM Savings House;
- Practicing Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) as an essential tool to increase FULM Saving House's brand awareness by potential clients and to drive organic traffic to the institution's home page;
- Introducing new digital channels, such as electronic communication, to directly access savings, loans, and educational information to support clients' interest in collecting more permanent information on latest products and services, e.g., newsletters;
- Implementing internal payments to access deposit and loan accounts to execute transactions among members more quickly and efficiently as a closed-loop payment;
- Establishing a Customer Relationship Management Software (CRM) and digital archives that adhere to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements to not only rely on core banking storage system, but rather to have own flexible database to stock customers data.



Established in 1999 with the mission "People help people", **FULM Savings House** remains one of the most trusted savings and credit unions in North Macedonia, providing its members a full range of safe and high-quality financial services and products. FULM Savings House's activities focus on meeting people's financial needs, contributing directly to the benefit of local communities.

Prioritising the quality of services, coupled with fast, dynamic and simple channels of financial access, FULM Savings House had **11,794 members in 2020** (3,342 of which were using credit services). With a network of 6 branches, FULM Savings House is constantly developing and implementing new technological solutions in its operational and strategic tasks.

Key learnings from the EaSI TA tailored training on digital tools and channels

1. Business planning is critical when integrating a new tailored digital strategy to align new technologies as a support mechanism, to avoid harming the existing operational processes;
2. Rich internal communication between front-office and management team is crucial to understand the clients' needs and feedback to ensure good, customer-oriented digital operational strategies and action plans;
3. Research on legal regulations and compliance analysis should be conducted before the introduction of specific digital innovation to avoid any violation of rights, e.g. related to digital signatures;
4. It is not always possible to introduce an applied digital solution before regulatory changes occur, e.g. eligibility of electronic wallets to be confirmed first by the regulator;
5. Resorting to 'one-size-fits-all' digital tools can be an alternative for institutions of all scales to promptly integrate new practices with their clients, and to improve their internal data exchange, for instance, by using Google Drive or similar cloud storage solutions.