How to get noticed online

The BizNatal Way

By Carolyn Jeffrey - BizNatal Founder 2020

BizNatal

Helping raise your business 'baby'
from conception to adulthood

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Overview/Introduction:

The growing use of the internet to find products and services we want, as well as answers to questions, means it's vital any business owner maximises their online presence as cost-effectively as possible. Many people are also surprised to learn that you can have an online presence (a) without ever creating one, and (b) without having a website for your business.

In this module we'll be introducing you to some simple ways to improve your business's online presence and how to take control of it so you can enhance your searchability, and to also ensure there's nothing nasty on the internet about you or your business.

This module is particularly important as all business owners find their email inboxes inundated with emails from people offering to improve online presence, and many business owners have found they've signed up for expensive programs that they don't need, or that cost a lot of unnecessary money and don't give the result they want or require. Often the programs lock them into payments on a lengthy contract basis too.

The topics we'll cover in this module include:

- Why you need an online presence
- Why do you need to be in control of your online presence
- How do you assess & update your current online presence?
- What is SEO?
- What is a keyword?
- What are the keywords for my business?
- How do you enhance your online presence?
- What is Google My Business and how do I use it?
- How to get online reviews
- How do you deal with online reviews?
- Tips to enhance website SEO
- Monitoring your online presence

At the conclusion of this module you should be able to be more confident in not only being able to deal with improving your online presence yourself, but also more confident to deal with telemarketers and an inundation of email into your inbox offering "amazing" deals to improve how your business is seen on the internet.

NOTE: This module deals with what you can do to improve your online presence without spending a cent. There are options available where you can pay agencies to do work for you, and you can purchase enhanced advertising programs too.

Template downloads include:

A simple online audit   A detailed online audit   Online information template

Why you need an online presence

Online searches are on the increase. Think how often you use your phone, computer or tablet to search for information, prices or reviews. It has become the number one research tool for anything and everything.

According to www.internetlivestats.com in 2016 more than 85% of Australia's population were internet users and this figure was growing at a higher rate than our population. When BizNatal checked the site in May 2020 there were more than 82,917 Google search queries being undertaken per second across the world. This equates to more than 7.1 billion in a day or 2.6 trillion in a year. And this is just on Google. Other search engines such as Bing And Yahoo also host half that number of searches. So, in a nutshell, if your business isn't listed on the internet, then you're missing out on a lot of potential customers.

And, being listed on the internet, or even having a website for your business, isn't enough. Your website and business name needs to compete with every other business that's listed there too, even those that you aren't in competition with. When we visited www.internetlivestats.com the number of websites across the world was up to more than 1.772 billion. For this reason it's important that you do all you can to optimise the searchability of your profile on the internet.

Why you need to be in control of what's online

Many business owners don't realise that, even if they don't have a website, or have never listed their business on an online site, they may still be listed online and, worse, the listing or information that's online may be incorrect or even detrimental to their reputation.

The range of problems I've found during online searches for clients has included:

- Incorrect contact details, even contact details mixed with that of a competitor;

- Incorrect hours of operation, which can frustrate a potential customer if they turn up and you're not open;

- Outdated or incorrect information about your current staff, even people associating themselves with your business who have never had a connection with you;

- Photographs depicting your business or your business logo in an inappropriate way;

- Negative and unanswered reviews;

- Absence of your business where competitors are listed;

- Links associated with your business that take visitors to inappropriate or unrelated sites.

How do you assess your online presence?

In this section we're going to walk you through conducting your own online audit for your business, while also saving time by making updates that are needed.

Step 1: Prepare your information

Before you start prepare a Word Document (or a Google Document) with the following details (or just use our **Online Info** template included in this module):

- Business name
- Business phone number
- Business address
- Website
- Email
- Brief description of your business, including some keywords, (see separate section in this module)
- Longer description of your business, including some keywords
- ABN
- Main keywords
- All keywords
- Trading hours

In a file put your logo and a photo or two to represent your business.

The Word Document, logo and photos will serve to help you provide a consistent presence for your business online. This information will be used to upload into directories and locations where you can list your business at no charge online.

Step 2: Find out what's online

Using Google, plus any other search engine you have access to such as Bing or Yahoo, conduct searches for the following:

- Your business name, including any variations, common names and misspellings.
- Your phone number
- Your business address
- Your competitors
- Your keywords, or words people are most likely to use to find your business.

As you do the search you can have two of our templates open - the Quick Online Audit and the Online Audit templates.

Quick online audit: This is where you will keep track of how your website (or if you don't have a website, your business name) is performing in online searches. Here you'll note where you find your website or where you see your business name.

Online audit: This is where you will note where your business is already listed in a directory, whether changes are needed and any logins you require. You'll also note where you've created extra directory listings.

Your aim will be to list your business on as many directories as possible, particularly those where your competitors are listed. Make sure you read through the terms and conditions of each before signing up, as some may require a payment before you start, or may ask for payment at a later stage. **DO NOT** enter credit card details unless you know what you're signing up for. Free listings should NOT need credit card details.

As you sign up you will often have to verify your email address, so make sure you have access to the email address you're signing up with, and check the SPAM folder if you don't receive a verification email if the directory says it's sending one.

As you do your search note whether the information is correct, where the business is listed and any changes that may need to be made. Try to make any changes to the directories as you go. Sometimes it's not easy to get the directories changed. Look for contact details, or even complaints or support links, if you can't find an easier way to update them. Often it can be a matter of following a link to "claim your listing" or it might ask "do you own this business?".

You should aim to claim all listings about your business that are online as this is a way for you to have better control over the listing, including answering any reviews that may be posted about your business in the future. It means you'll also be able to more easily make updates to the listing down the track.

The search landscape is changing every minute (or even every second), so what you list in today that's on page 1 may not be there tomorrow. We recommend, to save time, that you go no further than the first three pages of Google when you're conducting your audits.

What is SEO?

If you're in business, and particularly if you have a website or email address, you probably see this acronym regularly in your inbox. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation and businesses regularly find they're bombarded by people offering their services to improve their website SEO. In simple terms, it means how you can get a better online presence in internet searches.

There are various tricks that SEO specialists can undertake to improve search performance. We'll give you some tips as to how you can do some simple SEO work yourself without spending any money. Depending on your market and location, you may find you can boost your SEO substantially yourself without bringing in a specialist.

Beware of offers from "SEO experts" who promise to get you on the front page of Google or at the top of Google. Usually Google positions can only be guaranteed if you spend money on advertising with Google Adwords. The more competitive the market the less chance you have of penetrating onto page 1 for common search terms without spending substantial money.

What is a keyword?

Keywords are what people put into search engines such as Google to find information online. The words may be single words, but more likely to be a combination of words, a phrase or even a question. Every person is likely to use different words to find a business like yours. What they put into their search will depend on a number of factors including their age, the type of language common to their demographic, education (some people may not write well and therefore spelling may not be perfect), the way they speak or interest in writing long or short sentences or phrases, the type of device they're using to do the search, and even knowledge of what it is they're searching for.

Consider what you put into a search when you're looking for items online. Some people are more specific than others, and searches for one thing you're looking for may look very different from other searches you do.

Some of the most common words people put into searches to find products or services they need might cover: business name, type of product or service, brand names, sizes, colours, locations, time of day, day of week, names of people connected to the brand, questions about the problem they need your product or service to solve, specifics about a product's design or features. People may also add words like "reviews for" to find how a product or service is viewed by others, or they may put your brand or business name next to your competitor's name to find a comparison. They may also add descriptive words such as cheap, best, most popular to their searches too.

Your keywords should be used not only on your website pages, but should also be used widely in your social media, blogs, directory listings and any other online interactions you have, including responses to reviews posted by the public.

What are the keywords for my business?

When determining what the keywords are for your business the BizNatal way has a number of steps:

Write down all of the words, phrases and even sentences you would use if you were looking online for the products or services you offer.

Ask friends and family members to also contribute to your list. This doesn't need to be a formal process, you can just ask them for feedback when you're mixing with them socially (but try to jot them down at the same time if you can).

Use online tools to find suggested keywords. Some of the options include:

· Google Ads Keyword Planner
· UberSuggest
· Google Trends
· Answer the Public
· MOZ Keyword Explorer
· Woorank (if you have a website)
· SEO Optimiser (if you have a website)
· SEMrush (if you have a website)

How do you enhance your online presence?

The following section outlines the DIY options for how to increase your online presence, and each comes FREE of charge.

· List your business information, including keywords, on as many free online directories as you can.

· Post regularly to social media, particularly Facebook and LinkedIn, and include keywords in your posts, including adding hashtags for your keywords.

· Sign up to Google My Business (see later section in this module)

· Ensure keywords are used on your website and that you review your website performance regularly through Google Analytics and the online tools referred to in the previous section.

· Ensure your website is registered with search engines, particularly Google and Bing, and that it is set up to be regularly sending updates to the search engines.

· Ensure your website software is kept up to date and that it complies with search engine requirements, including being mobile friendly and secure.

· Update your website often, adding content containing keywords. (see later section in this module)

· Encourage online reviews of your business (see later section in this module)

Google My Business

Google My Business is a service offered by Google and is a key entry point for many people reaching out to businesses through Google's search platform. (See the example at right). If you search for a business by name on Google it will usually come up with a box on the right (on a desktop), or first in the search, and will usually include the name, contact and opening details for the business, pictures (particularly if they have a website), a map of their service area or actual location, plus links to add reviews and to access their website. On a phone you can also click the phone number to call directly.

Often businesses already have a Google My Business listing even if they've never set it up as information has been imported through other means including directly from your website or a map listing.
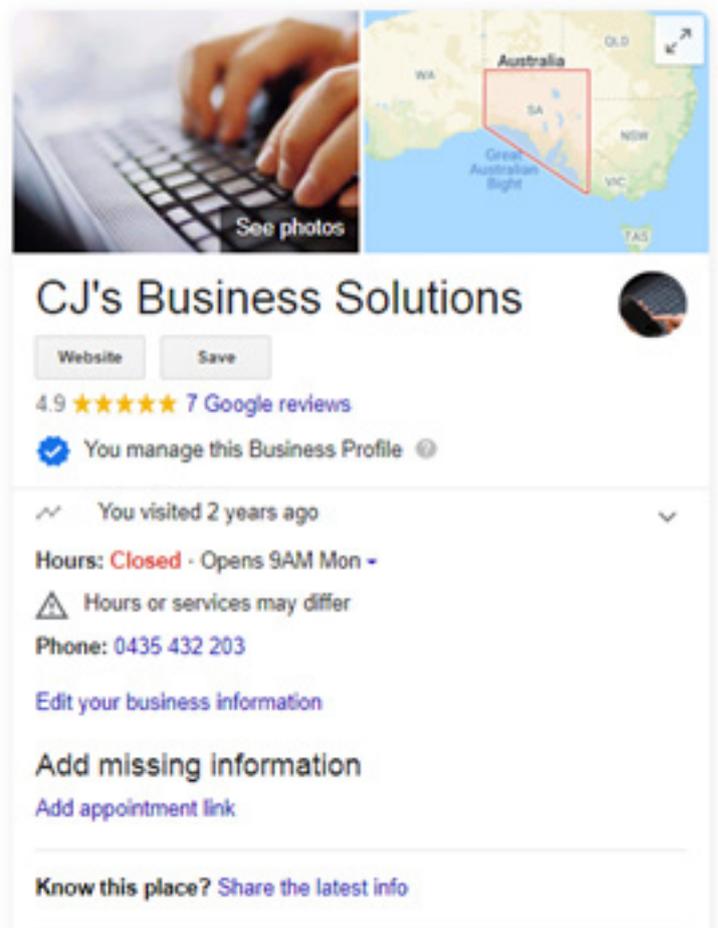
Before trying to register for Google My Business search online for your business name to see if the listing is already there. If it is it will likely have the question "Own this business". If you click this link you can claim the listing and follow the process to verify ownership.

If you find you're not listed you will need to add a listing. It's easy to begin the process if you already have a Google account (a gmail address is usually an indication). Put "Google My Business" into the search engine, sign in to Google and you can begin the process.

Don't worry if you don't have a shopfront or don't want your physical address known publicly, you will be asked to enter it, but have the opportunity to decide whether or not the address will be shown publicly. Enter all the requested details which may include adding photos and logos, your contact details, services offered, areas you service, hours of operation, methods of payment etc.

Initially your listing is unlikely to be published as your ownership of the brand will need to be verified first. In most instances this means a postcard will be sent via regular post to the address you've provided. The postcard will contain a verification number which must be entered online before the listing can be published. In some instances verification may be able to be established via a phone call or other methods, but usually the postcard is the only option provided.

Google My Business also offers the following features:

- **Posts:** Once verified, you can add posts to your Google My Business listing in much the same way as you post to social media. Your posts can include words, photos and even video. Make sure any posts you do include keywords for your business to assist with searches. Posts remain live indefinitely, but generally lose their value for searches after seven days, so you're encouraged to post at least every seven days.

- **Website:** If you don't have your own website you can make use of Google's free one-page website option within Google My Business. It is easy to build and will assist with SEO. Be aware the page is not likely to be seen on other search engines and must be deleted completely before you add a non-Google website address to your listing, otherwise it will continue to default back to the Google website.

- **Reviews:** Google My Business includes reviews from the public. Once you have control over your listing you can reply to the reviews - both good and bad - but be aware there is no way to turn off the review feature, nor to remove any reviews you don't like. If you don't like a review there are options to report it to Google, but they're unlikely to be removed unless it can be proven that the content genuinely breaches Google's terms. Those who post the reviews can alter or remove them. These reviews play a significant part in how high up the Google search your business will be found - poor or no reviews will see your profile fall against competitors with many positive reviews.

How to get online reviews

When you ask many people how they get their customers a common answer is "word of mouth". The move to more and more interactions online means we need to find other ways to encourage "word of mouth" in a changing world and online reviews are effectively "word of mouth".

It might sound obvious, but the number one action you need to take to get online reviews is to ensure you have a vehicle (or vehicles) in place so people can post online reviews. Make sure your business is listed in directories and online platforms that have a review option. Among the more popular review sites are: Google My Business, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Product Review, Booking.com, Yelp and Bing.

But, unlike Kevin Costner in the film Field of Dreams, the saying "build it and they will come", doesn't work. Just because you're listed on these sites doesn't mean you'll automatically get reviews. More often than not you'll need to do some work to encourage people to post reviews and, at the very least, let people know where they can post reviews.

Do not encourage people to post a review if it's more likely they'll post something negative rather than positive. Have a good look at what you do in your business. Is a request for a review likely to attract a positive or a negative review? If it's more likely that you'll get negative feedback then look seriously at changing the way you do business before encouraging people to post a review.

Under no circumstances should you offer to pay people (either cash or as an entry to a competition) to post positive reviews. Not only does this look unprofessional (a good business shouldn't need to pay people to say good things about them), but it's also frowned upon by the review sites themselves. By all means send them a voucher later if they've posted a positive review, but don't offer it up publicly in the first instance.

The following are some options to consider to attract reviews:

- Add links to where people can provide reviews on your invoices
- Send a followup email to clients asking if they were happy with your service and giving the links to the review sites, while also encouraging them to contact you directly if they were not satisfied with the product or service provided. (See example next page)
- If people provide comments in another way about your business, eg a visitor book, consider sending them a typed up version of their comments and encourage them to post to an online platform.
- By celebrating your reviews on your social media platforms you can often encourage others to make positive comments and to post reviews too.
- If you have premises you can put a sign up with the details of where reviews can be posted. For accommodation outlets think about putting them next to the wi-fi password or, if you've got a cafe, put them on the menu or on the table as so many people are usually on their phones while they wait. (See example at right)

Tell your friends & family you're here

Check in or upload photos of your stay

/your facebook address here

- When you hear a customer say something positive during their transaction with you, don't be afraid to say, "I'd love it if you could tell others about us. If you have the chance could you please post a review to xxxx." You can also have a card designed to hand to customers who give verbal praise to indicate where a review can be posted.

- Send an SMS message with the link to a customer after you've completed your sale. People are more likely to post a review if it's easy to do it and it's fresh in their mind.

- If you have an online business you can also include a pop-up or a followup message at the transaction stage with links to provide a review.

Email review request example:

Thank you for choosing XYZ business If you were happy with our service could you please take a moment to rate our service on

<div align="center">

FACEBOOK

GOOGLE

</div>

 If for some reason you were not happy with our service could you please give us a call on 0435 432 203 or email your concern or feedback to midwife@biznatal.com.au so we can try to rectify the problem.

How do you deal with online reviews?

Have you ever checked out an online review of a product or a business before making a purchase? According to the 2016 Sensis social media report 60 percent of people read online reviews or blogs before making a purchase decision.

But, before you get too distressed about that one bad review you got, or the mystery person who left you one star with no explanation, the good news is that, on average, people expect to read five reviews before making a decision.

Before dealing with any reviews stop and reflect on how you would deal with the person making the comment if they were standing in front of you at the counter when other customers were around. Don't think you can say whatever you like without consequences because it's online and not in person.

There are a number of rules business owners should follow when it comes to dealing with online reviews:

- No matter whether they're positive or negative, EVERY review deserves a reply.

- Never take to the keyboard in response as a knee-jerk reaction. If a review has created an emotion other than being happy, take time out to think carefully about your reaction, run it past someone you trust first, and then respond.

- If you receive a negative review ALWAYS aim to get the main conversation offline by encouraging the poster to contact you directly through other means to discuss the situation, or, if you know their contact details, say you'll be contacting them to discuss it (and make sure you do follow through with it).

- Except where it may compromise you for a legal battle, don't be afraid to accept and acknowledge that something may have gone wrong, particularly if it's obvious.

- When answering a negative review EMPATHY is the key. Often people just want to be heard and have their complaint acknowledged.

- Don't rush to offer a refund or to solve the problem online as this can open you up for a rush of people just seeking refunds and to exploit the system. It's fine to offer something to them offline if you wish to do so.

- For positive reviews, take the opportunity to also use your response as a means to further reinforce positive aspects of your business and encourage the poster to be a follow-up customer.

- When replying be real and try to avoid repetitive responses that look robotic and like you've made no real effort, eg, don't just put "Thanks" or click the LIKE button.

The following are some examples:

Positive:

Review: Had our carpet installed today by XXXX. Bill was so friendly and professional.

Response: Thanks xxxxx for choosing us to install your carpet. We're pleased you're happy with the job. At xxxxx we like to deliver quality services with a smile, so it's good to hear that Bill followed through. Hope you enjoy your purchase for years to come.

This response acknowledges the person's name, so it personalises it. It acknowledges that you've read what was said, then, by adding the last sentence, gives a further marketing point about the longevity of the product.

Negative:

Review: One star. (And no further comment)

Response: We're sad to see you gave us a one star review XXXX. At xxxx we strive to offer quality products and services, and feedback is an important part of our business. Please contact us directly on xxxx to discuss your concerns so we can make improvements in the future. XXX

Although this is likely to be a non-review in reality, someone who just clicked the wrong button or just gets a kick out of doing this (a bit like a vandal), it's still important that you show you care. Naming the person reinforces it for them (and they'll likely receive a message that you responded), so if it was an accident they may review it, or they may be shamed by the fact you mentioned them and may remove it. By encouraging them to call you directly you can potentially find out if there was a genuine problem. By adding a name at the end it further personalises the response and shows you genuinely care about resolving the issue. Don't be tempted to use a fake name as that can potentially cause more problems. Just a first name is fine.

Review: I bought a dress from xxxx and it doesn't fit, even though I followed the fitting guide and my measurements matched perfectly. I won't be buying from xxxx again.

Response: We're sorry that you aren't happy with your purchase, xxxx. We do endeavour to be accurate with our fitting guide, but the reality is not everyone is exactly the same size and shape. Please email us at xxxx with your contact details and we'd be happy to follow up with you.

Again, it acknowledges the person's name. It expresses empathy for the customer's situation, without admitting fault. We're not apologising that the sizing was wrong. We are showing we understand their concern. We are offering an opportunity to fix the situation for the client (offline) without committing to a refund or exchange without knowing the details of the purchase.

Tips to enhance website SEO

Every website platform is different in terms of performance online in searches. Some platforms are not well-respected by search engines such as Google, and others may require additional purchases to enhance their SEO capabilities.

BizNatal uses and recommends Wordpress as it is a platform which is well-accepted by search engines, and there are simple plugins available to help make SEO easier.

Regardless of the platform you use the following are some things you can do on your website which may improve its online search performance:

· Blogs which make regular use of your keywords, including phrases.   It's generally accepted that blogs should be more than 500 words in length. You can also enhance their SEO value by adding tags in certain platforms, adding headings and sub-headings using keywords and artwork with file names including some of your keywords.

· Phantom or ghost pages on your website which aren't included in your public menu, but which can still be read by the public and found online through searches. These pages would include your keywords within the content, and the content would be relevant to your brand.

· Exchange links with other reputable brands ie you have links to their website and they have links to yours which further drives traffic.

· Add links within your own site so visitors can click for further information. Keeping people productively on your site for longer will enhance your searchability too.

· Make sure your site is user-friendly and loads quickly.

· Ensure it has a Security Certificate or SSL (secure sockets layer) certificate. To check if it does type https:// before your website address and see if your site comes up without any warnings. You can also see on some browsers a padlock adjacent to the address which indicates it's got a certificate installed.

· Ensure it is mobile friendly, so check what it looks like on a range of devices

· Avoid plagiarism of other sites and don't be tempted to simply repeat the same set of keywords over and over again without logic as the search engines will pick this up and penalise your site.

· Ensure the software on your site is kept up-to-date. If it's likely to represent a risk to the public it will be penalised in searches and may risk being blacklisted.

Monitoring your online presence

Whether or not you have a website you are advised to continually monitor your online presence through the following methods:

- Online audits (as referred to in this module) should be conducted at least once every six months. The quick audit is advised (first two pages of Google only) monthly.

- As annoying as they are, ensure you have notifications coming to you for your online listings, including reactions on Facebook, Google and other directories. Do not simply ignore these notifications without first reading and following up on them if necessary.

- Set up a Google Alert for your business name by visiting https://www.google.com.au/alerts and entering your business name. This will send you an email when your business name is mentioned online. Unfortunately, this will not usually include mentions on social media.

Your Online Presence checklist:

Now you've got the tools to start getting your business noticed online the following is a brief checklist of items to undertake:

☐ Identify your business keywords

☐ Sign up to Google My Business

☐ Identify your competitors

☐ List your business on free online directories

☐ Claim all unclaimed listings and correct any errors

☐ Schedule your online audit followups

☐ Ensure keywords are prominent on your website if you have one

☐ Schedule regular posts on social media, including keywords

☐ Are you asking for reviews?

☐ Are there unanswered reviews? Develop your strategy to reply to them.

Online audit template

As you go through searching the internet for your business name or that of your competitors fill in this template (downloadable version part of this module).

You'll be recording the site the listing is on (best to copy and paste the actual address), any user name or password you have to use to access it, any information or notes about changes that are needed, the date you last checked it and any further actions that are needed (eg followup email coming).

The template is provided in Microsoft Word format, but can also be a Google Document.

Client:
Search terms:

Next audit due:

Date of last audit:

Site link	Username	Password	Info & Notes	Last checked	To do list

Simple website performance check

Once you've got a website it's important to keep up regular checks on how it's performing with your main keywords. This template is available for download as an Excel spreadsheet but can also be set up as a Google Sheet.

You will be putting your search terms into a search engine such as Google and recording what page of the search you found the site for that term and if it was appearing in Google My Business (GMB) in what is termed the LOCAL PACK at the head of most searches. Record the date you conducted the last check. You can also have a column for recording notes too if required. It's worth doing a quick check using this template monthly or, at the very least, quarterly.

Search term	Date	Search	GMB

Online audit info

This is where you will record the information you wish to upload to online directories to ensure the message about your business is accurate and consistent. We have created this as a Microsoft Word document, but it can also be a Google Document. Once set up you'll just need to copy and paste the information.

Business Name	**BizNatal**
Address	**Victor Harbor, South Australia**
Phone Number (s)	**0435 432 203**
Website Link	**https://biznatal.com.au**
Email address	**midwife@biznatal.com.au**
ABN	**49 831 967 936**
Hours of operation	**Weekdays 9am-3pm**
Short description of your business	**BizNatal is a small business incubator providing business training resources, support, mentoring and coaching.**
Long description of your business	**BizNatal is a small business incubator providing business training resources, support, mentoring and coaching. Online resources cover marketing, business planning, websites and much more. The business is targeted at developing microbusinesses in regional areas of Australia.**
Keywords	**Small business support, BizNatal, microbusiness, business training, business mentoring, business, small business, Carolyn Jeffrey,**
Other info, eg trade licences	

Need more help?

BizNatal

Helping raise your business 'baby'
from conception to adulthood

Downloadable resources

Coaching/Mentoring

Startup programs

You can download video presentations that accompany this module from our website too.

To find out more about mentoring and our BizNatal business programs phone 0435 432 203.

www.biznatal.com.au