



Economic Impact Evaluation

# Buy from the Bush

How a grassroots social media campaign helped boost regional and remote economies during Australia's drought crisis

June 2020

αlphaβeta

Australia

part of **Accenture**



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>About Buy from the Bush</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>1. Boosting Bush Economies</b>	<b>06</b>
Case Study: Kennedy the Label	12
<b>2. Empowering Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>13</b>
Case Study: mink and me	16
<b>3. Improving Community Wellbeing</b>	<b>18</b>
Case Study: Singing Magpie	21
Case Study: Wattle & Twine	22
<b>4. Appendix</b>	<b>23</b>

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This report has been commissioned by Facebook Inc and Buy from the Bush, and prepared by AlphaBeta Australia. AlphaBeta Australia is a research firm with offices in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. It specialises in combining advanced analytical techniques and innovative data to generate new insights and fresh perspectives on the challenges facing business and government.

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# Executive Summary

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**Buy from the Bush (BFTB) is a social media campaign that uses Instagram and Facebook to promote regional and remote businesses to people living in metropolitan areas.**

The campaign was started by Grace Brennan in October 2019, three years into a drought that had crippled agricultural communities in Australia's east, including her farm in Warren.

This report seeks to quantify BFTB's impact on remote and regional communities over a four-month period by analysing the revenues of featured businesses and the experiences of their founders.

BFTB has proved to be successful, with analysis revealing significant increases in revenue, jobs and market access for regional and remote Australian businesses. A total of \$5 million was generated for featured businesses, connecting them with new customers in Australia and overseas.

Three quarters of featured businesses now ship interstate – more than double the share that did so prior to the campaign.

Closing this gap has created new employment opportunities with one in five featured businesses hiring staff to meet demand generated through the campaign.

BFTB has been particularly impactful among female entrepreneurs, with 97% of featured businesses run by a woman. Many see BFTB as a community of like-minded women who support each other to learn new skills and meet their goals. As a result of the campaign, 45% of business owners learned new technical skills, including marketing and IT.

Many BFTB benefits have flowed through to regional and remote communities, improving both bank balances and morale. Business owners reported spending their earnings on local goods and services, and attempting to “give back” by volunteering or joining community groups.

The effects of the BFTB campaign are also likely to extend beyond the drought. By nurturing more diverse businesses and new skills, especially digital ones, in regional and remote areas, BFTB is likely to improve their overall resilience. This will be an important asset as communities face new challenges such as COVID-19.



# Buy from the Bush has positively impacted featured small businesses in remote and regional Australia in five key ways:



Revenue

1

**300%**

average sales uplift per business

**\$5M**

total revenue uplift



Employment opportunities

2

**21%**

of businesses hired new workers



Market access

3

**38%**

of businesses began shipping interstate

**19%**

of businesses began exporting overseas



Entrepreneur empowerment

4

**97%**

of business owners are women

**45%**

of business owners learned a new skill



Wellbeing

5

**90%**

of business owners experienced improved quality of life

Note: Impacts were calculated for 275 businesses featured between October 2019 and February 2020. See Appendix for details.

# About Buy From the Bush

**Buy from the Bush (BFTB) aims to support small businesses in regional and remote Australia by promoting them to a wider audience, primarily via social media.**

BFTB promotes businesses by showcasing them on its website and social media accounts. Each post includes imagery and a caption that encourages consumers to engage directly with the featured business for questions, comments and purchases.

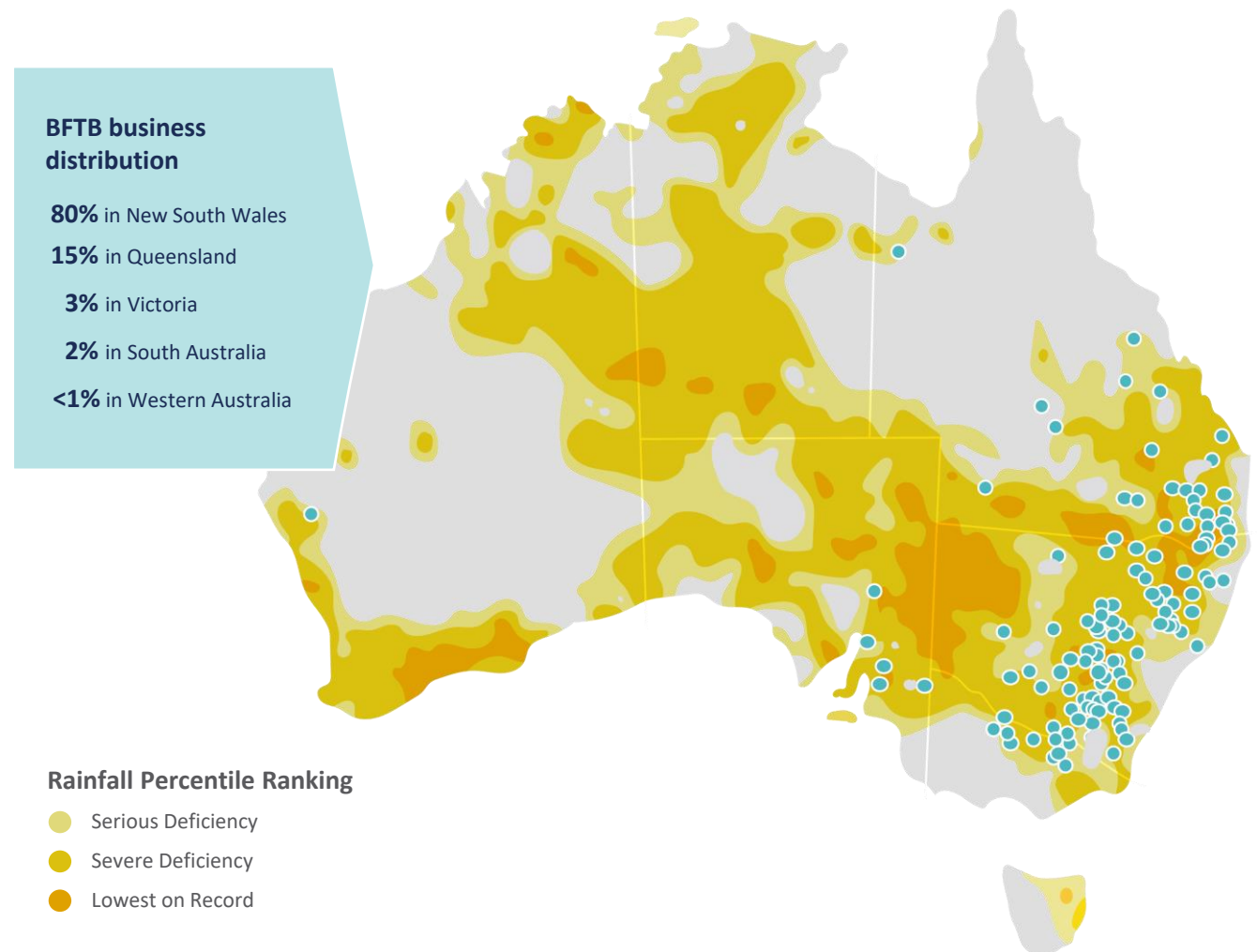
Small businesses seeking to be featured can self-nominate by establishing Instagram and Facebook accounts and using specific BFTB account tags and hashtags in their posts. These submissions are evaluated by BFTB founder Grace Brennan and a small project team against set criteria, namely: whether a business is located within a drought-impacted zone; and how well the business and its products reflect the diverse people, businesses and spirit of the bush.

This report quantifies the impact of the first four months of the BFTB campaign, but acknowledges that it has continued to evolve according to the needs of featured businesses and consumers, and market conditions in Australia and overseas. Since its 2019 launch, the campaign has grown to include media partnerships and physical events where businesses can sell directly to consumers.

Note: Findings of this report are based on a February 2020 survey of 275 BFTB businesses. The analysis period was October 2019 - February 2020.

## Buy from the Bush featured 275 businesses across regional and remote Australia during its first four months

*Location of BFTB businesses across Australia, Oct 2019 – Feb 2020*



Source: *Rainfall Deficiencies: 1 April 2018 to 29 February 2020 – Bureau of Meteorology (2020).*

Note: Business distribution figures do not sum to 100% due to rounding.



1

# Boosting Bush Economies

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Buy from the Bush boosted revenue, employment opportunities and market access for featured businesses

# Buy from the Bush added \$5M in revenue to small businesses in regional and remote Australia

During the four-month evaluation period, BFTB helped drive \$5M in sales for featured businesses – including nano, micro and small businesses on which regional and remote economies rely.<sup>1</sup>

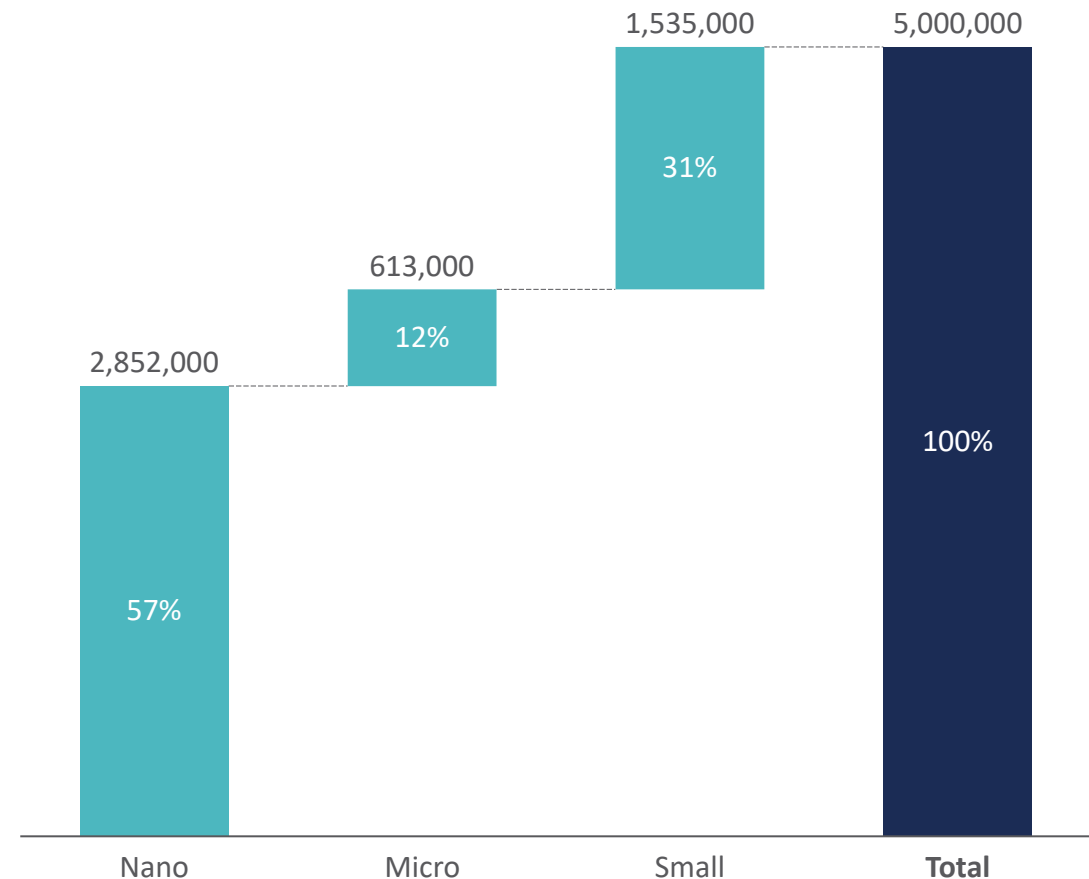
Nano businesses accounted for about six in ten BFTB businesses and generated a total of \$2.9M in additional revenue during the period.<sup>2</sup>

Micro businesses earned an additional \$0.6M after being featured on BFTB, while small businesses gained \$1.5M in total.

On average, businesses experienced a sales boost of around \$18,000 after being featured on BFTB. These benefits were observed between October 2019 and February 2020 (prior to material effects of the COVID-19 pandemic).

## Nano businesses accounted for 57% of additional revenue generated

Total additional revenue for featured businesses split by business size (\$)<sup>2</sup>



Source: AlphaBeta survey and analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

1. Small businesses contributed to 33% of industry value added (IVA), equivalent to \$414 billion in 2018. 75% of these have 1-4 employees. *ABS Jobs in Australia 8155.0 (2018), Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (2019)*.
2. Nano businesses are defined as earning <\$5,000 per month in revenue; micro businesses between \$5k - \$10k; and small >\$10k. Please see the Appendix for a more detailed calculation of total revenue. There were 79 valid data points for this chart.

# Buy from the Bush drove continued growth for featured businesses

The BFTB impact peaked in the month post-feature, with featured businesses experiencing a 300% revenue increase on average. Revenues remained above pre-BFTB levels for many months.

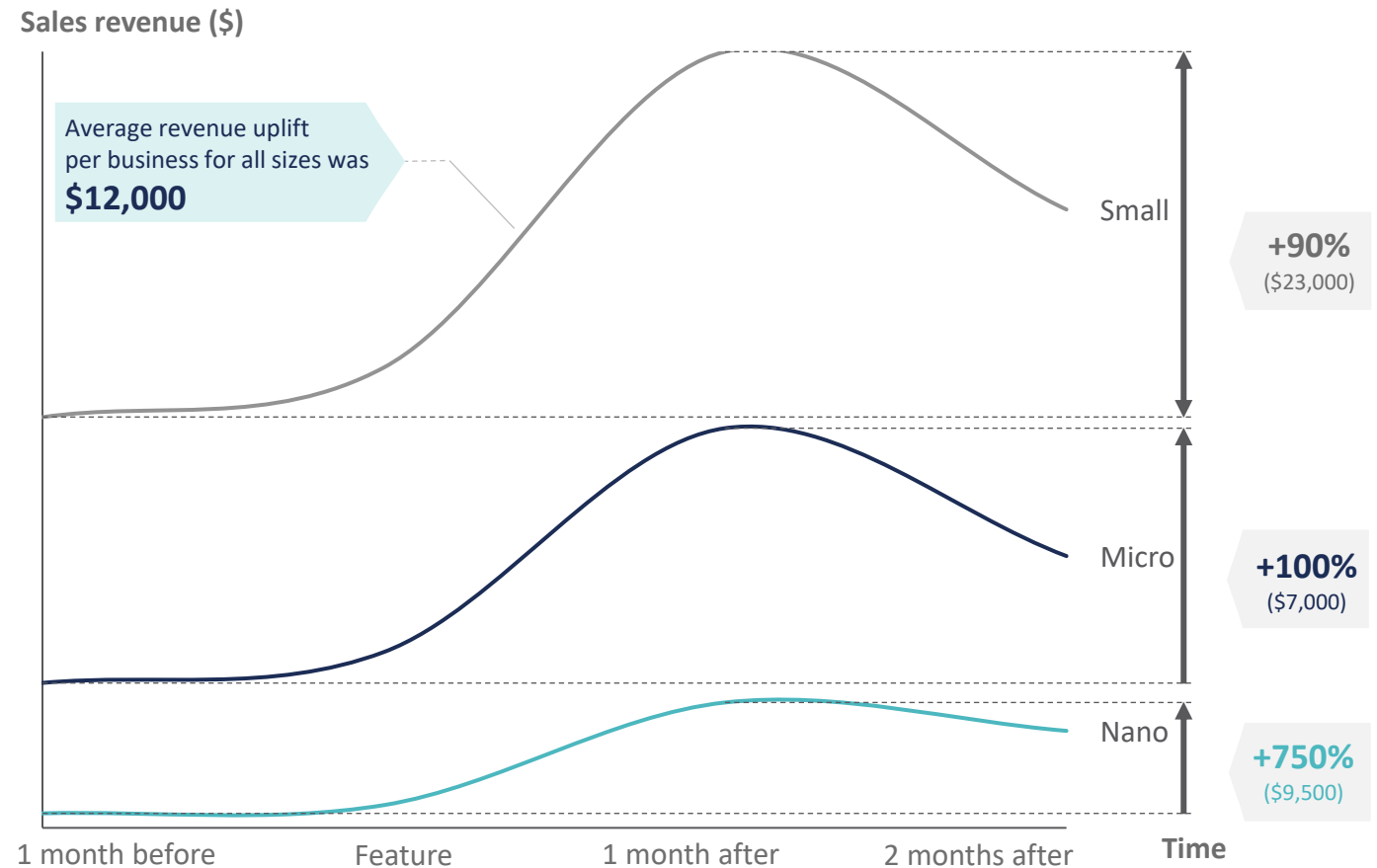
Growth effects were more pronounced for nano businesses than for larger businesses, due to the fact that nano businesses generate lower revenues by definition.

On average, nano businesses experienced a revenue increase of 750% in the month post-feature, while revenues of small and micro businesses roughly doubled.

Businesses continued to benefit from the campaign for several months post-feature, as their products became better known online, in the media, and among the general public. Some businesses also derived lasting benefits from improving their online sales and marketing channels as a result of BFTB.

## BFTB boosted business revenues by \$12,000 on average in just one month

*Absolute value of sales revenue over time, by business size*



Source: AlphaBeta survey and analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: Nano businesses are businesses that earn <\$5,000 per month in revenue; micro businesses earn between \$5k - \$10k; and small businesses earn >\$10k. There were 79 valid data points for this chart.



# Buy from the Bush helped connect small businesses to national and global markets

**BFTB illustrates how technology has lowered barriers to different markets, allowing businesses to connect with customers across the country and around the globe.**

This is particularly true for small businesses, for which the transaction costs of exporting can be high.<sup>1</sup>

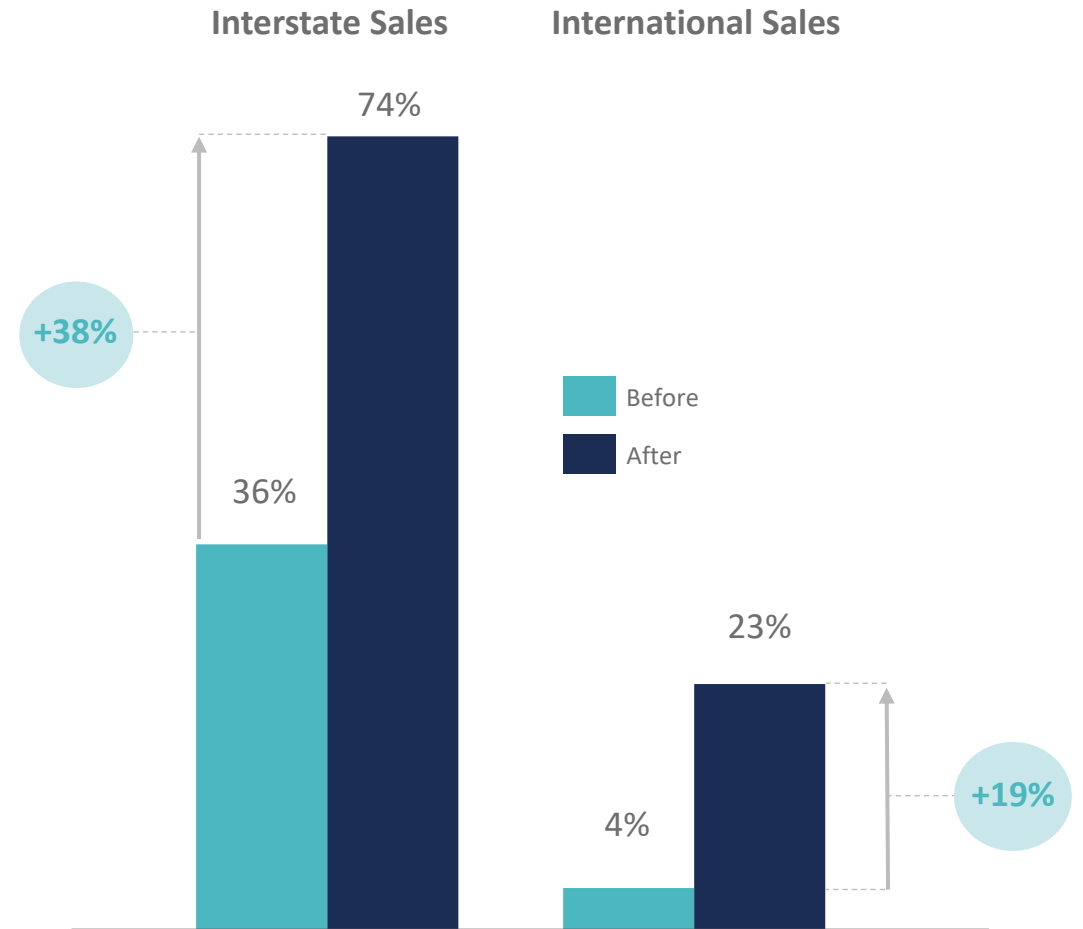
Prior to the BFTB campaign, most featured businesses relied on local sales and foot traffic. Just over a third of businesses were shipping their products interstate, while only 4% had customers overseas.

The survey data found that BFTB more than doubled featured businesses' online sales, which accounted for 58% of all sales revenues following the campaign. As a result, almost 4 in 10 featured businesses began shipping interstate, and almost 2 in 10 began shipping overseas.

Businesses reported exporting to 11 countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada.

## BFTB introduced 38% of businesses to out-of-state buyers and 19% to international buyers

*Percentage of businesses that have sold to new markets post-feature*



Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 104 valid data points for this chart.

1. *E-commerce Guide - Australian Trade and Investment Commission (2019).*

# Buy from the Bush helped generate new employment opportunities

One in five featured businesses hired staff members to assist with the sales growth that BFTB generated over the evaluation period.

Of businesses surveyed, micro and small businesses were most likely to hire new staff. Employment opportunities arose between October 2019 and February 2020 (before the COVID-19 pandemic was declared) and were predominantly part-time positions.

Growth prompted by BFTB saw 8% of featured businesses transition from nano and micro categories, to the small business category as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ie. more than 4 employees).

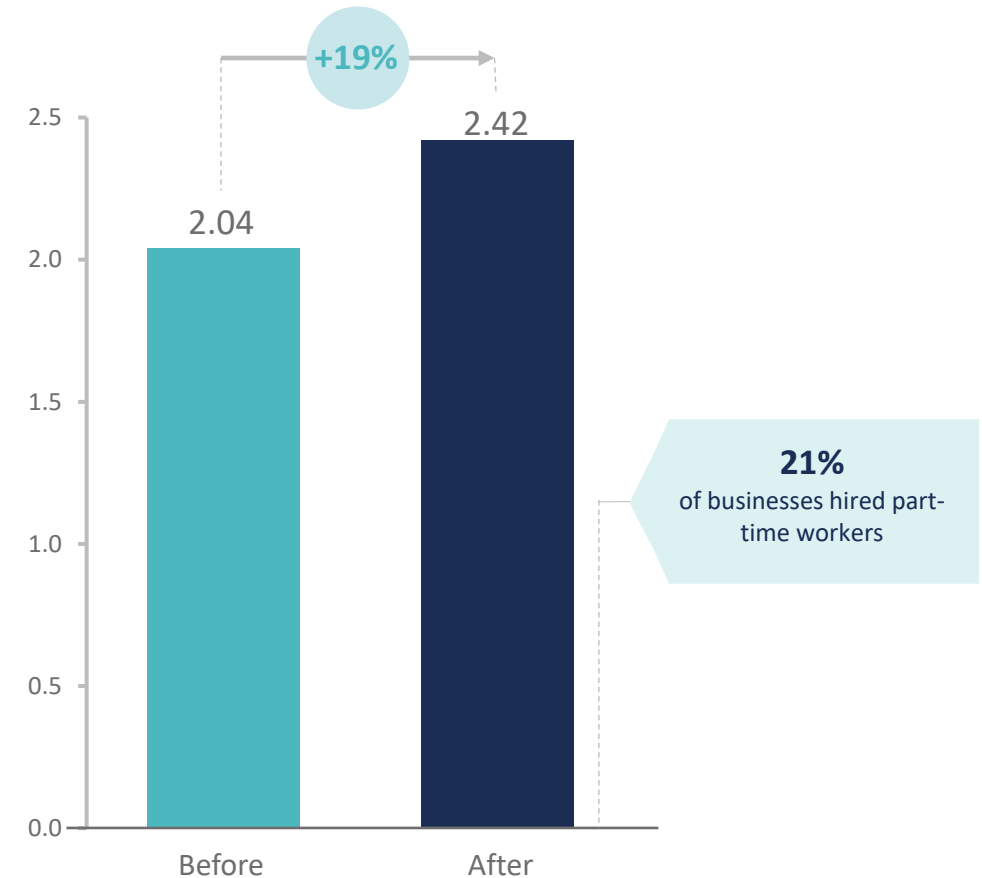
*“The extra income earned through BFTB in the lead up to Christmas enabled me to invest in new products to grow my business and also hire a part time employee to help with orders.”*

- Anonymous

”

21% of featured businesses created new jobs, with the average number of workers per business increasing by 19%

Average number of workers per BFTB business, before and after the campaign



Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 89 valid data points for this chart.

# Buy from the Bush boosted engagement with regional and remote businesses

Businesses featured by BFTB benefited from a magnified digital presence as well as media attention, resulting in increased interest in their products and personal stories.

The majority of featured businesses experienced greater media coverage, particularly in:

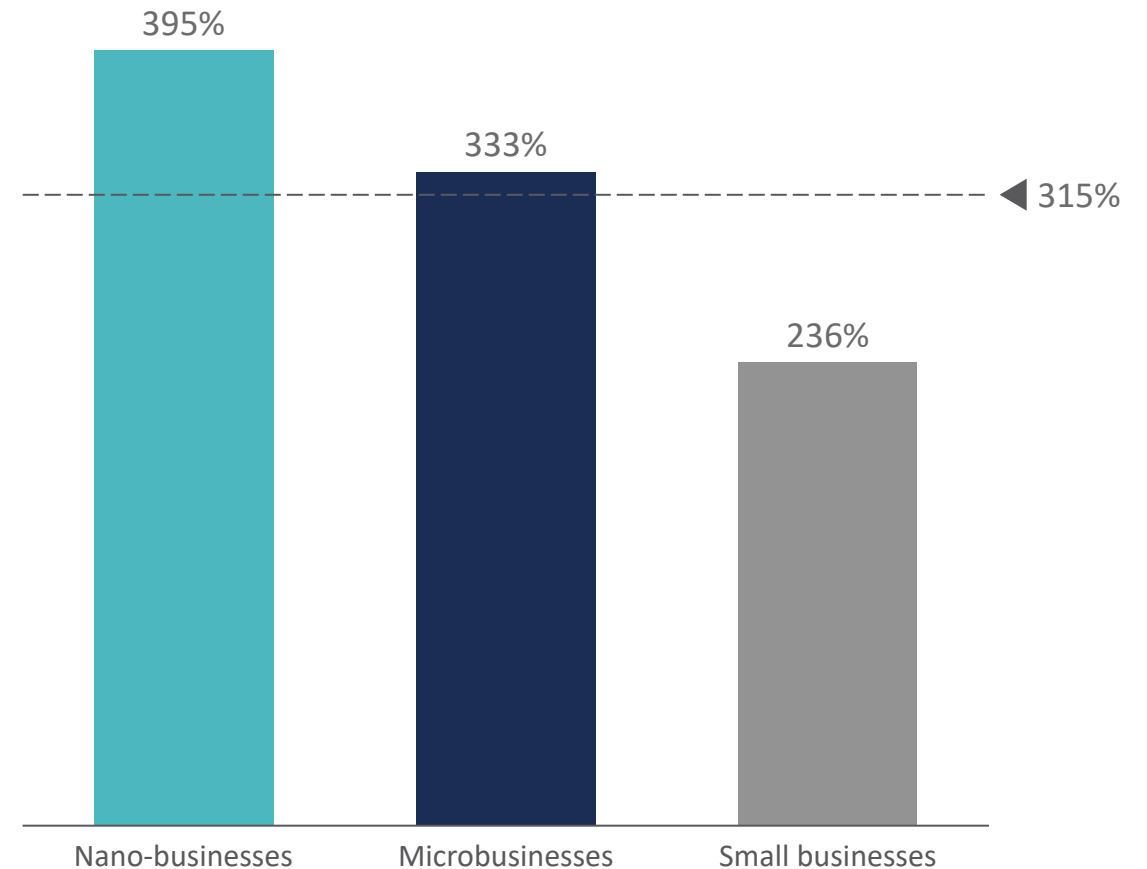
- 1 **Print:** Magazine and newspaper – at a local and national level
- 2 **Online:** News websites and additional social media platforms
- 3 **Broadcast:** Non-local television and radio

Inclusion in the campaign also led to real-world opportunities for businesses prior to Christmas, such as metropolitan pop-up events that allowed them to reach and connect with a new customer base.

The increased media attention and website traffic generated throughout the campaign period demonstrated the benefits of a *multi-channel strategy* and the valuable interplay between social and mainstream media.

Businesses experienced an average increase of 315% in website visits for the month following their BFTB feature

*Percentage website visit growth by business size*



Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 75 valid data points for this chart.

## CASE STUDY

## Nyngan mum's side business supports family through worst drought in generations

Annabelle and Dom Kennedy's 40,000-acre sheep and cattle station in Nyngan, central New South Wales, has been in the family for three generations. But three years of minimal rainfall saw the family staring down the barrel of the worst drought in generations.

"We thought that we were prepared for drought," Annabelle explains. "Every year for the past 10 years, we would put some crop away in silage, but we went through our stores in 12 months."

Throughout the drought Kennedy the Label, Annabelle's clothing and lifestyle business, has been the family's sole source of income. Launched in 2017 as something to "work on in the background," Kennedy the Label's Christmas sales generated \$30,000 - a fourfold year-on-year increase - after being featured on Buy from the Bush.

"BFTB came at the most incredible time. We had already seen the closure of most small retail outlets in our town and were facing another Christmas period in an economy where there wasn't anything around," Annabelle says.

Other Nyngan businesses have benefited from Kennedy the Label's BFTB revenue too. Annabelle spent \$4500 at the post office, and "far more than usual" at the local cafe, supermarket, and school canteen.

Instagram: @kennedythelabel



*"Buy from the Bush came at the most incredible time. We'd already seen the closure of most small retail outlets in our town and were facing another Christmas period in an economy where there wasn't anything around."*



2

# Empowering Entrepreneurs

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Buy from the Bush provided an opportunity for women to upskill, pursue their interests, and achieve their business goals

# Buy from the Bush helped female entrepreneurs expand their business capabilities

## The BFTB experience encouraged and enabled women to develop the skills they needed to build stronger, more resilient businesses.

A vast majority (97%) of featured businesses were owned by women. While many of these businesses were established as side ventures, the BFTB experience has prompted 45% of female entrepreneurs to upskill to support business growth.

Business owners surveyed for this report planned to develop their skills in three key areas: marketing and advertising; IT proficiency; and, business and financial literacy. One in three business owners said their lack of marketing and communications skills was their biggest barrier to growth.

BFTB helped by connecting women to advisors or digital workshops, enabling them to upskill in three key areas:

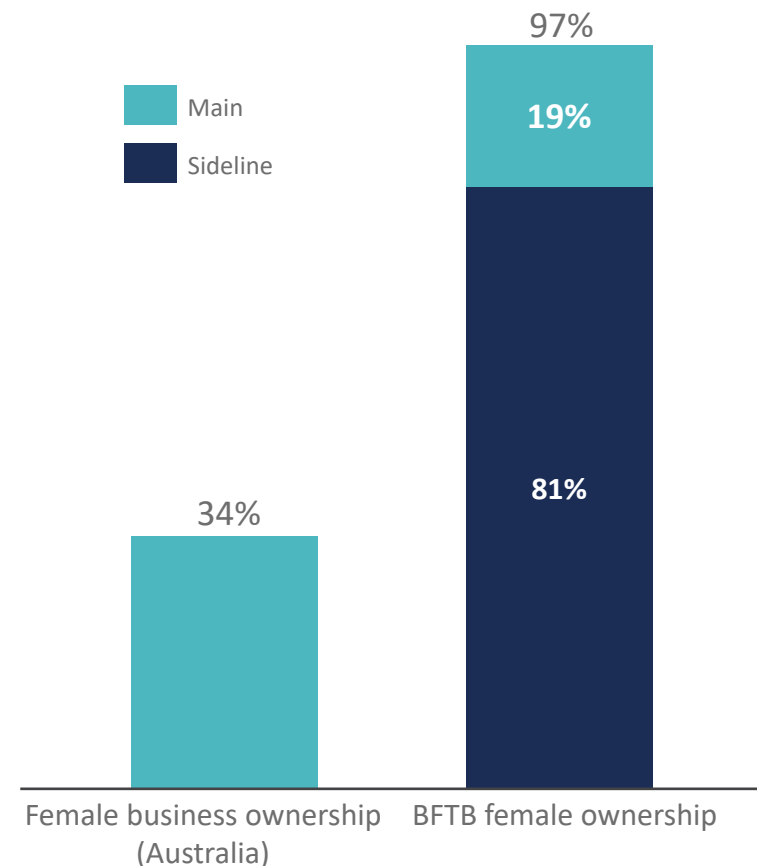
- 1 Developing online marketing strategies
- 2 Incorporating multiple payment systems
- 3 Developing and overhauling websites

Online sales growth reflected these new capabilities. Survey results show that featured businesses more than doubled their online sales, which grew to represent 58% of their overall sales following the campaign, from 26% previously.

By encouraging and enabling regional and remote Australians to develop new online capabilities, BFTB is likely to have a lasting effect on how these communities withstand times of drought and other crises. For instance, these businesses have been able to continue connecting with and serving customers online throughout the recent COVID-19 crisis.

## 97% of BFTB businesses are owned by women, compared to the national small business average of 34%

Percentage of female ownership in Australia and amongst BFTB featured businesses



Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020; *Profile of Australian Women in Business – ABS and Office for Women (2015)*.

Note: There were 100 valid data points for this chart.

# Buy from the Bush helped business owners achieve key milestones to drive business growth

Businesses featured by BFTB were able to achieve business growth milestones faster, enabling many owners to turn their side ventures into a significant source of income.

BFTB was crucial in helping entrepreneurs reach their business targets. For instance, BFTB helped half of the businesses surveyed expand into new markets (e.g. interstate or overseas). Just over 4 in 10 businesses hit a sales target, while 36% developed new products and 12% re-focused their branding.

Many businesses hit more than one growth target. About 60% of surveyed businesses achieved two or more targets and 46% achieved three or more.

Entrepreneurs can use additional revenues to re-invest in their businesses and develop new skills, leaving them better placed to deal with challenges that may arise.

BFTB businesses achieved important business milestones during the campaign, with many entrepreneurs achieving multiple targets

*Percentage of businesses that achieved the following milestones*



**50%**  
expanded into  
new markets



**28%**  
Increased online  
capabilities



**36%**  
developed a  
new product



**41%**  
hit a revenue target



**12%**  
re-branded  
their business

Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 92 valid data points for this chart.

## CASE STUDY

## mink and me invests in skills and growth after Buy from the Bush boom

Coonamble businesswoman Lucy Moss founded mink and me in 2015, after moving to the rural New South Wales town with her farmer husband. The boutique sells coffee, clothing, homewares as well as health and beauty services – but demand all but evaporated when the drought hit a year later.

“We had a really good season in Coonamble, then basically the tap got turned off right around harvest time in 2016,” Lucy recalls. “The drought has been quite difficult on a store like mine. Discretionary spending is one of the first things to go when things get tight.”


mink & me engaged a web developer to build its website in 2018 in an attempt to “drought-proof” the business by targeting customers from outside of the region. Online sales grew slowly but saw a dramatic shift upward when they were featured by Buy from the Bush.

After being featured three times in October online revenues exploded, growing almost five-fold in the two months that followed.

With online sales now driving half mink & me’s retail business, Lucy is investing in further training in social media and Facebook marketing - skills that will help keep her ahead of the curve.

“Buy from the Bush has given me the confidence and finances to take the business to the next level,” she says.

*Instagram @minkandme*

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black and white checkered dress and colorful earrings, stands with her arms crossed in a rural landscape. In the background, there are trees and a black dog sitting on a wooden fence. The scene is set in a dry, open field under a clear sky.

“ Buy from the Bush has given me the confidence and finances to take the business to the next level. ”





3

## Improving Community Wellbeing

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Buy from the Bush made a meaningful difference to community wellbeing and quality of life

# Buy from the Bush improved connections between regions and cities, and within communities

Social media campaigns like BFTB give businesses an opportunity to share their stories widely and bring attention to the challenges they face.

For many business owners, the benefits of BFTB extended far beyond financial gain. BFTB customers were more likely to connect with business owners on a personal level, leaving messages of encouragement online and on the phone. A vast majority of business owners said BFTB had improved community wellbeing by reducing feelings of isolation during the drought crisis.

BFTB has given consumers from metropolitan Australia and overseas a new and more sustainable way to help regional and remote Australia.

*“ We have connected with new people nationwide and interacted with their stories and communities. We have been seen, heard, and given the chance to share our skills with a larger audience which in turn strengthens our mission and purpose as a local team.*

– Anonymous

”

BFTB improved community wellbeing in four main ways

*Benefits reported by featured business owners*



**1. Improved connection**  
with people outside the local area



**2. Strengthened relationships**  
within their communities



**3. Created a number of new**  
**local businesses**



**4. Increased tourism**  
to their area

Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 89 valid data points for this chart.

# Buy from the Bush business owners aimed to generate benefits for themselves and their local communities

BFTB business owners were just as likely to have started their business for financial reasons as for personal reasons such as health, enjoyment and personal growth.

Some business owners said running their own business gave them the flexibility to earn an income while raising a family; others aimed to create jobs in their local communities and to inspire others to pursue entrepreneurship.

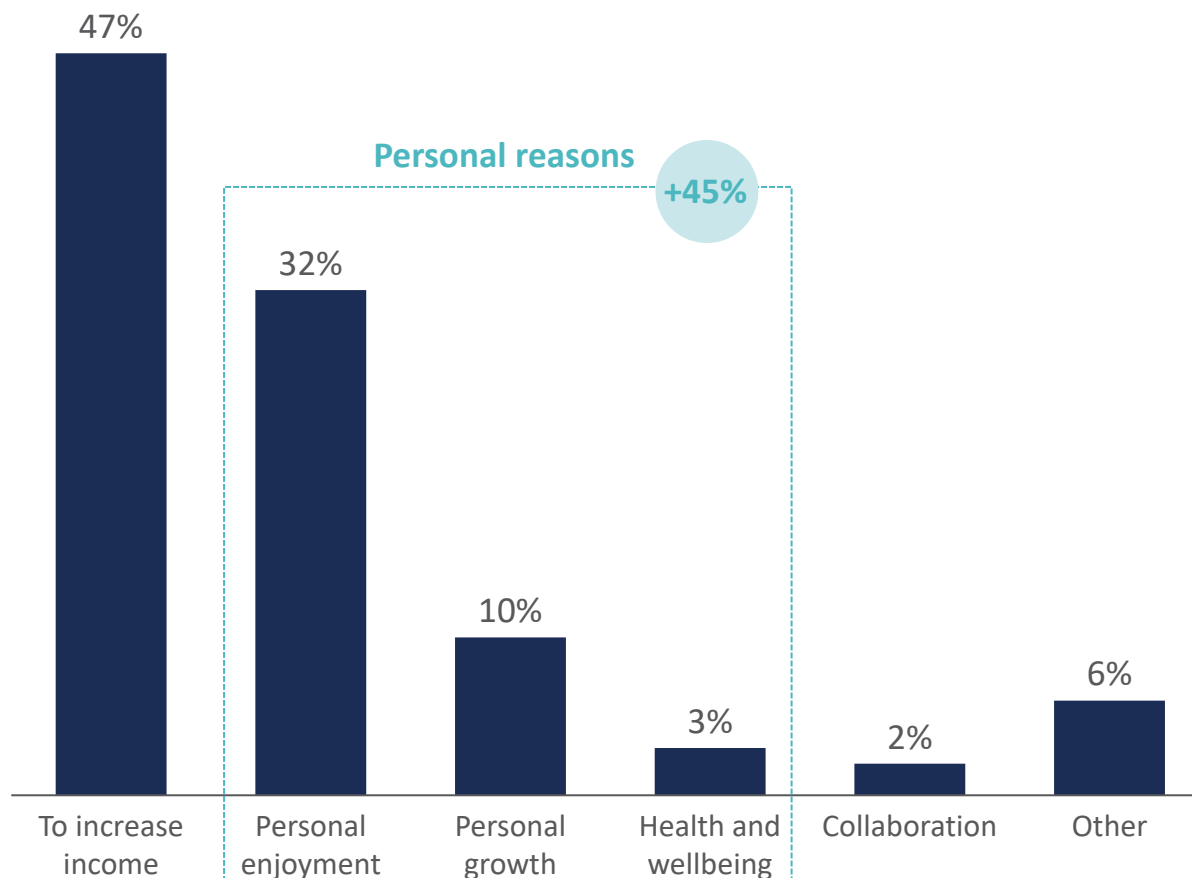
BFTB has nurtured a new category of small business in regional and remote communities by showing that it is possible for entrepreneurs to support themselves and their families while pursuing their interests. As these businesses grow, communities benefit from greater local spending, new business creation and potential job opportunities. This has been particularly important for regional businesses as they operate through the COVID-19 crisis.

“*The level of awareness and respect people in our community have for creatives now making an income and a business from their ‘hobby’ has definitely improved. Many more people are now aware that I am running a business and are interested and asking about it.*

– Anonymous

About half of BFTB businesses were created for personal rather than purely financial reasons

Percentage breakdown of reasons for starting their BFTB business



Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 149 valid data points for this chart.

# Buy from the Bush improved the quality of life for regional and remote business owners and their communities

The increase in disposable income from the campaign helped business owners and their families enjoy greater freedom and give back to their communities.

Ninety percent of business owners said BFTB had improved their quality of life by boosting their self-esteem, reducing financial pressure and connecting them with other entrepreneurs so they felt less alone.

As a result of the campaign, business owners were most likely to increase discretionary spending, spend time with family or learn a new skill – or a combination of the three. Some chose to give back locally by signing up to community organisations or volunteering for causes like Meals on Wheels – prior to the current crisis.

“ The additional income has meant school shoes and clothes; it has meant a treat of ice-cream at our local cafe/post office for the kids when taking deliveries in. I was able to locally source supplies for our bathroom renovation that we started in July and then stopped as we had no money.

– Anonymous

## BFTB business owners engaged in leisure and community activities as a result of the campaign

Percentage of business owners that reported engaging in the below activities as a result of BFTB



54%

Spending on discretionary goods and services



48%

Spending time with family



45%

Learning a new skill



37%

Travelling



24%

Engaging in physical exercise



23%

Community organisation sign ups



21%

Volunteering

Source: AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020.

Note: There were 89 valid data points for this chart.

## CASE STUDY

## Buy from the Bush helps Singing Magpie Produce prepare for a century celebration

In 2021 the farm run by Sue Heward's family will celebrate its centenary. But in late 2019, with drought gripping South Australia's Riverland, birthday celebrations seemed a long way off.

While her parents concentrated on fresh grape, fig, quince and pecan sales, Sue started Singing Magpie Produce to sell sun-dried fruits; it represented a new opportunity for the family and a bid to reduce food waste.

Online sales grew slowly but after Singing Magpie Produce was featured on Buy from the Bush in November 2019 Sue watched her sales escalate to \$40,000 worth of orders in the following weeks – almost half her annual sales. Her Instagram and Facebook followers surged, and business continued to grow.

She's since added an employee to the business. "Local people who see how we've grown realise that there is the potential to pivot their business online – and the coronavirus has amplified that," she says.

She also credits BFTB with strengthening her relationship with customers. "Yesterday a parcel got lost and Australia Post rang me, then I rang the lady. She lives in Melbourne and said that she follows every post about our fruit and the family. She has ordered four times and says that it helps her stay real and feel connected to where her food comes from.

"That story made me cry," says Sue.

She's now saving hard to invest more in the business and build a manufacturing space to support Singing Magpie Produce's continued expansion in the lead up to that big birthday.

Instagram @sue\_singingmagpieproduce

*"Local people who see how we've grown realise that there is the potential to pivot their business online – and the coronavirus has amplified that."*



## CASE STUDY

## Buy from the Bush, Wattle & Twine and true Aussie spirit

Country co-op Wattle & Twine was founded by cattle farmer Amy Ballinger in Jandowae, Queensland in 2017 to bring together like-minded women from rural and regional Australia.

The site showcases stories, services and handmade products from rural, regional and remote Australia. To date, Amy has featured in excess of 50 female-owned businesses, aiming to “give back to the country community” by advocating for artists, designers, makers and creators who lack the resources or desire to market themselves.

Since being featured on Buy from the Bush, Wattle & Twine’s web traffic has grown more than tenfold and sales have boomed off a base of only a few hundred dollars per month. Customers across Australia continue to support the co-op; two Sydney schools ordered 300 handmade gifts to be distributed at a Mother’s Day event.

“Buy from the Bush has cemented in my mind that the Aussie spirit is really about rallying behind people when they need support. And the Aussie spirit is alive and well”, says Amy.

The Buy from the Bush experience has also brought the Ballinger family closer to their local community. When Wattle & Twine was featured on national news as part of the Buy from the Bush campaign, the whole community celebrated.

“There were lots of messages of support sent our way,” Amy says.

*Instagram @wattleandtwine*

“Buy from the Bush has cemented in my mind that the Aussie spirit is really about rallying behind people when they need support. And the Aussie spirit is alive and well.”

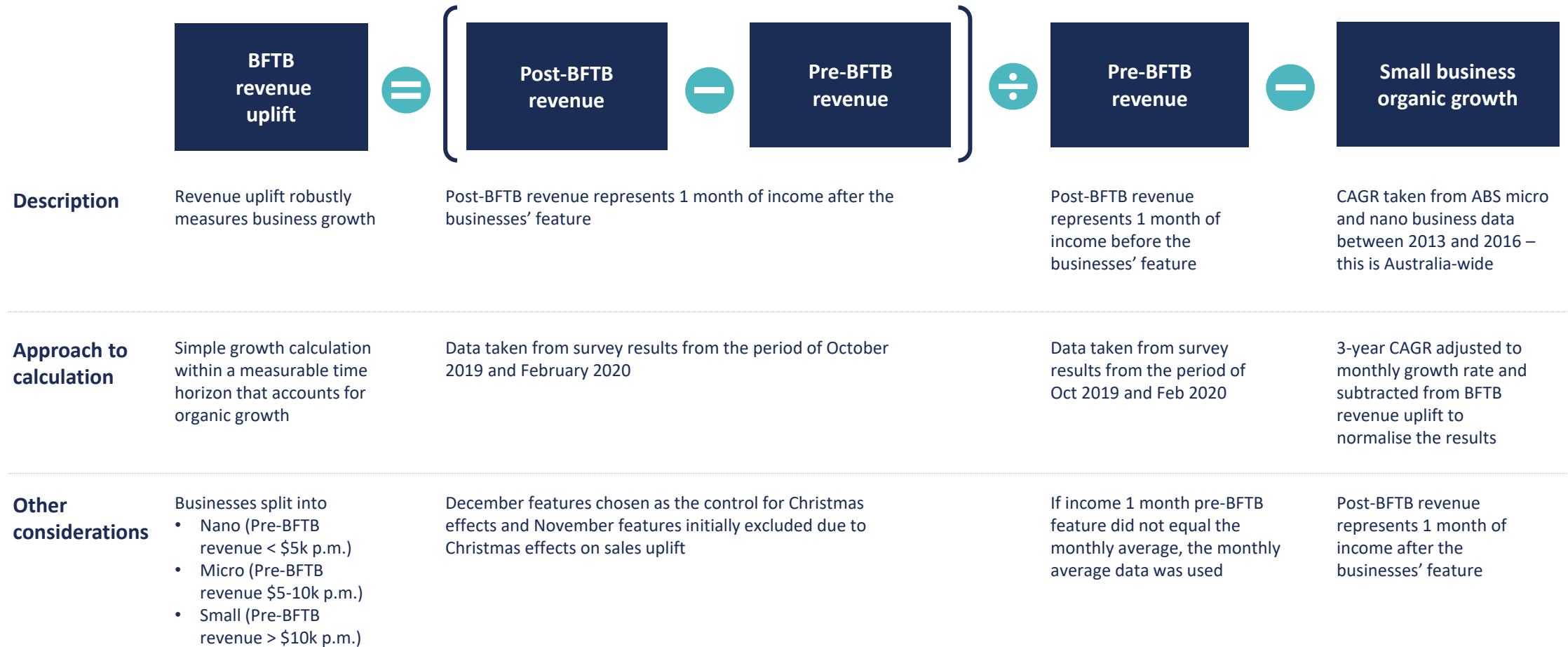




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# APPENDIX

# Methodology: Revenue Uplift Calculation



Note: Period measured is October 2019 – Jan 2020

Note: The number of responses to each question varies based on the nature of the question. However, the absolute values are included under every chart as required.



# Methodology: Survey approach and total revenue calculation

## Survey method

The survey was distributed to all 275 businesses featured on BFTB from October 2019 to February 2020. 150 responded in total. Businesses were asked questions under 5 themes: questions about their business, economic impacts of BFTB, skills and development, community impacts and their personal story.

## Total additional revenue calculation

To calculate total revenue over the time period, businesses were broken into 3 categories:

- Category 1 (C1) - businesses that responded to the survey with data (79 businesses);
- Category 2 (C2) - businesses that responded without data (71 businesses); and
- Category 3 (C3) - businesses that did not respond (125 businesses).

A different growth uplift % was applied to each of the 3 categories of business. For example for month 1, revenue growth was calculated at 300%, 225% and 150% respectively. Note that 300% is the median growth rate for 1 month, and both 225% and 150% are conservative estimates relative to the median. Total revenue was calculated over a period of 3 months post-feature – this involved determining the revenue reduction experienced after 2 months and 3 months.

A conservative estimate of 50% of uplift was taken for the one large business that existed, whose revenue substantially influenced the total. This was then added to the total:

$(79 \times \text{C1 uplift}) + (71 \times \text{C2 uplift}) + (125 \times \text{C3 uplift}) + \text{large business uplift} = \$5 \text{ million}$

## Additional factors considered to determine impact

**Business size:** Businesses were split into three categories by annual revenue: nano, micro and small. All three categories were used in analysis; where aggregate figures were highlighted, a weighted average was applied. One substantially larger business was featured, which was generally excluded from quantitative calculations as it was an outlier.

**Seasonality:** Separating a potential Christmas sales effect from the BFTB impact was a primary concern during analysis, and impact was adjusted in two ways. Firstly, businesses featured before 22 November were used as a control for growth rates. Secondly, businesses that experienced sales different to their monthly average, prior to their BFTB feature, were asked to provide their monthly average figure. This ensured that the resulting figures were more robust.

**Time Horizon:** The time horizon used for data collection spanned 16 October 2019 to 25 February 2020. Figures on sales revenue growth were calculated over two time periods: firstly, 1 month before feature to 1 month post-feature, and secondly, 1 month before feature to last month (February 2020). This ensured that analysis could estimate the immediate impact of the campaign, as well as a potential continued impact.

**Extraneous events:** Extraneous events include trade fairs or multiple features on BFTB within the specified 1 month time horizon, or just prior to the last month (February 2020). Businesses that experienced any of these were initially excluded as outliers.

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strategy x economics