

Mortgage Awards 2008: The Winners



MORTGAGE AWARDS 2008 WINNERS

Category	First	Second	Third
Bank Lender of the Year	Abbey	Halifax	Cheltenham & Gloucester
Overall Mortgage Lender of the Year	Nationwide	Abbey	Cheltenham & Gloucester
Building Society Lender of the Year	Nationwide	Skipton	Coventry
Mortgage Packager of the Year	All Types of Mortgages	Pink Home Loans	Enterprise Group
Buy-to-let Lender of the Year	BM Solutions	Mortgage Express	UCB Home Loans
First-time-Buyer Lender of the Year	Abbey	Nationwide	Halifax/Northern Rock (joint third)
Commercial Lender of the Year	Royal Bank of Scotland	Commercial First	NatWest
Offset Lender of the Year	Intelligent Finance	Woolwich	Abbey
Sub-Prime Lender of the Year	Accord Mortgages/BM Solutions (joint first)	GMAC-RFC	First National
Self-Cert Lender of the Year	Bank of Scotland	BM Solutions	TMB
Equity Release Lender of the Year	Just Retirement	Hodge Equity Release	National Counties/Northern Rock/Norwich Union
Best Online Lender	Halifax	Abbey	Cheltenham & Gloucester
Small Mortgage IFA/Whole of Market Firm of the Year	Money4Dentists		
Large Mortgage IFA/Whole of Market Firm of the Year	Mortgage Force	London & Country Mortgages	Thinc
Newly Qualified IFA/Whole of Market Firm of the Year	Ian Abbott, Charcol Direct	Sarah Smith, money4dentists	Mary Waring, Positive Solutions
Equity Release IFA/Whole of Market Firm of the Year	Simon Chalk, Mortgage Portfolio Services	Ian Howarth, Parker Kelly	
Commercial Mortgage IFA/Whole of Market Firm of the Year	Adrian Dadds, Black Tower Financial Advisers	Jeff Lenihan, Worldwide Financial Planning	
Online Mortgage IFA of the Year	www.lcplc.co.uk		

Commercial Mortgage IFA of the Year

Adrian Dadds, Blacktower



Commercial mortgage advising should not be pigeon-holed, according to Adrian Dadds (pictured), an IFA for Blacktower Financial Advisers.

As winner of the Commercial Mortgage IFA of the Year category, the married dad-of-three believes there is more to meet the eye in the commercial mortgages sector.

He said: "This is a fast growing and exciting market which is very young and there are various possibilities to make a difference to people.

"We should not pigeon-hole ourselves as the market changes fundamentally."

Mr Dadds – who specialises in developing funding, property development and residential property development at the Surrey-based firm, which was established in 1998 – spent 14 years working for Barclays Bank and four years at Birmingham Midshires before he became an IFA in 2004.

With this background in banking, Mr Dadds explained

that he knew what he was letting himself in for. He said:

"The growth in business has been phenomenal. It is about understanding the people, being analytical and the excitement of doing great business. These are rewards in itself.

"We deal with 40 to 50 different lenders. There are not many firms doing what we do on the commercial side.

There are quite a few opportunities for us. As long as we maintain our good relationships, that is always our driving force. From a business perspective, it should be a very important time for us."

As a high achiever – he climbed Morocco's Atlas mountain range for charity – Mr Dadds remains open-minded about the impact of challenges such as the credit crunch.

He said: "Pricing has gone up in a short space of time, which is quite hard for clients to grasp. Pricing will also be a big issue and with the credit crunch upon us it will be harder to get the deals. We have lost that certainty."

Online Mortgage IFA of the Year

London and Country Mortgages



The leading London and Country Mortgages complete packaged website aims to consistently improve relations on all levels, according to its Pat Bunton (pictured), operations director.

Launched in 2002, the website started off as a basic communication tool, but in time the firm changed the focus of the website with a more dynamic approach to assist people in their research for a mortgage.

As Online Firm of the Year, Mr Bunton emphasised its technology drive and said: "Technology is an important part of our business and is becoming more part of the mortgage market.

"Being a company that has dealt with phone, post and email, the whole idea of offering a website that was convenient and hassle-free would make the process easier. It is always about looking at new ways to improve our relations on all levels."

He added: "The two most popular developments are the best buy tables and calculator tool. But it is not just a case of making a complete website, it is about asking what people need and want."

In 2007, the Bath-based firm had 4000 mortgage applications from the website – which accounts for more than 12 per cent of their total business.

In addition, the firm provides bespoke solutions for Tesco, The Guardian, Motley Fool and the Telegraph – just to name a few – in providing its mortgage service finder.

With the Online award adding to its already successful bow, Mr Bunton said: "Awards are very important as they are specific to our industry. It is a sign of evolving and continuing to grow.

"It is great to be involved, offering something new and innovative and good to be recognised. In this industry, you cannot stand still and we will not just stand by our laurels."

Newly Qualified IFA of the Year

Ian Abbott, Charcol Direct



Charcol's new kid on the block Ian Abbott (pictured) is the winner of this year's Newly Qualified IFA accolade in the Mortgage Awards.

Mr Abbott, executive consultant for Charcol, took his first step on the financial ladder in July 2006 with the Brighton-based firm and has not looked back since.

Based in the same city, he believes the most rewarding aspect of the role is dealing with the variety of clients and forging long-term relationships with them.

He said: "Each one is individual and has a different set of needs and a different way of looking at things and you really need to be able to adapt your approach quickly. It is really satisfying being able to help facilitate someone making the next step up the property ladder or saving them hundreds of pounds on a better deal.

CeMAP qualified Mr Abbott is already fully aware of the constantly changing financial market and added: "The

image of a well-paid broker floating around and having nice long lunches really is not the reality. There is so much knowledge to gain and the market is constantly changing, especially at the minute – a lot can happen in 24 hours at the moment and you have to stay on top of it."

Taking off his IFA cap, Mr Abbott has toured with the likes of rock chick Gwen Stefani and performed on the Royal Variety Show with rock band Bon Jovi, as part of an American-style marching drum corps band called the Senators.

He believes it is important in any field of work to have some recognition for people who aspire to be at the top.

He said: "It keeps people motivated and gives something to work towards other than just financial success. Hopefully it helps spread the word that brokers actually provide a fantastic service for people and we are an important part of the industry."

Equity Release IFA of the Year

Simon Chalk, Mortgage Portfolio



Dispelling myths and misconceptions around equity release requires an almost evangelical zeal, according to Equity Release IFA of the Year Simon Chalk (pictured).

The equity release planner who launched the Sheffield-based Mortgage Portfolio firm five years ago said: "It is a terrific job if you believe in providing a superb client experience, having patience and promoting high ethical standards.

"Clients in need of equity release are a delight to engage with, typically being very courteous and willing to take time in making life enhancing decisions. In my position of placing the money into the hands of people that clearly benefit from having it, it is gratifying."

With a colourful financial career history – from training up with Standard Life, to forming the formerly-named Mortgage Portfolio Services business in 2003 – Mr Chalk believes equity release has the greatest scope for develop-

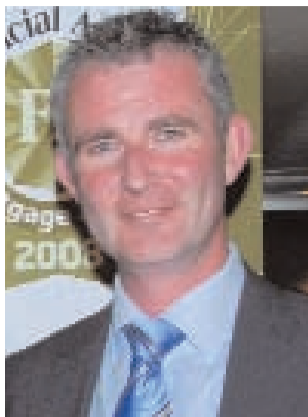
ment with exciting initiatives. He said: "I enjoy handling complicated, technically-challenging cases, but the greatest satisfaction comes from simply helping people to fulfil their retirement dreams at a time of life when they deserve to be free from money worries."

The 41-year-old believes that hands-on experience is a great teacher. He said: "Text book knowledge can be quickly attained. Time in practice learning how to serve clients in often complex and varying circumstances is a better teacher.

"Getting across our message that we do not merely 'broke' business, rather that we skillfully prepare and implement a personalised plan, individual to our client, can be challenging. It is hugely rewarding to see how much a client's life can be improved by releasing equity from their home."

Overall Lender of the Year

Nationwide



Nationwide has hailed its fair, open and honest approach to lending as the key to its award success after being crowned as Mortgage Lender of the Year, with Andy Castle (pictured), corporate account manager, picking up the award.

With about 13m members, 20m accounts and employing 19,000 people across the UK, the building society proudly embraces the achievement.

Jackie Lawrence, media relations manager for Nationwide, said: "It is important to us that the values we stand for - such as fairness and transparency - are recognised by the media and consumers. Awards such as these give third party endorsement to the values that we have set out to achieve. We are a mutual organisation and as such focus on providing long-term good value to our members. We offer long-term good value and focus on prudent and sustainable lending practices. We do not have any hidden fees and charges and do not charge a higher lending charge unlike some others."

Ms Lawrence explains how they differentiate themselves from the competition and added: "Our base mortgage rate is 50 basis points lower than most of our competitors, we do not charge a higher lending charge and we do not use income multiples but rather focus on affordability to ensure that our customers are in the best position to repay their loan."

Nationwide aims to continue its recognised triumph, in offering products which provide long term good value to all borrower groups in the current challenging market and to support first-time buyers and those coming to the end of their current deals.

In addition, Ms Lawrence added that it strives to continue its transparent approach to mortgages and excel as one of the only lenders to offer a 25-year fixed rate mortgage with the option to change with no penalties after 10 years.

Offset Lender of the Year

Intelligent Finance



The successful recipe of understanding and education has propelled offset bank Intelligent Finance to the top of its field, being recognised Offset Lender of the Year.

Intelligent Finance has delivered a number of key campaigns to raise the levels of understanding in offset, with its One in Four campaign, illustrating that a quarter of consumers would be better off with an offset with as little as an 8 per cent saving as part of their mortgage.

In addition, it has also worked with Trigold to deliver a new offset online calculator which shows both brokers and customers the benefits of each option.

Cammy Amaira (pictured), director of sales for Intelligent Finance, believes this has championed the benefits of offsetting and has taken the lead educator status on offset in the market.

He said: "The continued focus for Intelligent Finance is education - this is paramount and key to the brokers'

understanding of the offset concept. Most brokers agree that offset is an interesting concept, although what is clear is that the challenge is around education. Only by increasing knowledge and awareness of this concept can providers truly hope to drive the market forward."

Launched in 2000 as part of the HBoS group, the bank has noted that the offset market has continued to grow and develop at a rapid pace, largely aided by developments in technology.

"Some of the biggest changes of technological innovation in the last seven years have included its online decision in principle, online case tracking, online application, advancements in mortgage sourcing and point of sale offers.

Adding to its other successful key changes last year, the bank included a new mortgage payment option which enabled its customers to select how they want their offsetting to benefit them.

Buy-to-Let Lender of the Year

BM Solutions



Despite a prediction of subdued house price growth this year, Buy-to-Let Provider of the Year, and joint first Sub-Prime Lender of the Year, BM Solutions believes strong tenant demand from higher immigration levels and housing affordability underpins the fact that the sector is still going strong.

As the UK's leading specialist lender providing products in the buy-to-let, self-cert and sub-prime sectors, Phil Rickards (pictured), head of sales for BM Solutions, explained its foreseeable approach to the current fluctuating market.

He said: "The fundamentals underpinning the buy-to-let sector are sound. Although we expect subdued house price growth in 2008, there remains strong tenant demand from higher immigration levels and housing affordability concerns for first-time buyers."

As the specialist lending brand of HBoS, the firm aims to

support intermediaries with its forward-thinking technology. Delivered through the comprehensive One Minute Mortgage online application system, it allows consumers to submit all their applications online, providing an online decision in 60 seconds. The system is available 24 hours a day and seven days a week, giving customers the time and flexibility to submit business with flexibility.

Mr Rickards has backed its commitment in all areas of business and hailed the Buy-to-Let Provider of the Year award as a symbol for its overall consistent drive and dedication.

He said: "We are dedicated to providing intermediaries with outstanding levels of service. These awards allow us to receive feedback from brokers, and it is always great to be nominated and recognised for this commitment."

"This recognises our commitment to providing brokers with market leading products and outstanding service in this sector."

Equity Release Lender of the Year

Just Retirement



Just Retirement has used its candid attitude and customer focus to keep ahead of its competitors to make its mark in the Financial Adviser Mortgage Awards, according to its head of retirement and income solutions.

Crowned Equity Release Provider of the Year, the Surrey-based firm has drawn on a simplistic view to business.

Nigel Barlow (pictured), head of retirement and income solutions for Just Retirement, said: "It is a focus on what consumers' needs are and about making sure that the consumers get the solution that is appropriate to them. We have a very candid attitude - we aim to solve the problem, and do this very well by giving them the appropriate information they want."

"We did have a very good reputation for our customer service. People do expect that and we are keeping focused on that. You cannot be complacent and you must never lose

sight for the consumer is the most important thing. The range of needs are growing all the time and more people are becoming aware of the benefits of equity release in that it is an emerging supplement income in retirement."

Mr Barlow believes attention to detail is paramount and an important basis for its success. He continued: "We have put a lot of research into our products and we want to make sure that people are comfortable with using us. We want to branch out more to consumers rather than just advisers. We are always working on product changes and improvements. More people are becoming comfortable with equity release, in drawing money from their house to provide for their needs and retirement."

Mike Fuller, chief executive of Just Retirement, backed the awards and proudly stated that its "aim is not to be the biggest provider of retirement solutions - just the best."



Advising to impress: judging the awards

Mark Roberts

The mortgage industry has been subject to severe pressures in recent times and the focus of the annual Financial Adviser Mortgage Awards is resonant with the challenges currently facing the industry. The overriding aim of the awards process is to assess the quality of service to the consumer and select a winner. In a tough economic climate, a high quality of service and advice will always be of value, especially so as consumers struggle to access mortgage finance through a shrinking range of options.

The judging process is straightforward but nevertheless presents a daunting prospect for the finalists in the Newly-Qualified Mortgage IFA and Equity Release IFA categories. Applicants in these categories are presented with a case study and, with 30 minutes to consider their response, must then face an industry panel to present their recommendations and justifications. Traditionally, the finalists are of a high calibre and 2008 was certainly no exception with the judges facing a very tough task in identifying clear winners. The Small and Large Firm submissions are no less challenging, but are judged on the basis of a detailed written response to a case study. Finally, the online adviser category is judged on the content and presentation of the firms' actual websites.

Newly qualified mortgage adviser All of the candidates in this category impressed the panel with their technical knowledge and their rapid accumulation of industry knowledge.

The winner of this category was Ian Abbott, of Charcol Direct, whose technical expertise and industry knowledge was excellent but who also displayed a 'bedside manner' more akin to that of an adviser of many years standing. His client-centred approach was a credit to both his own desire to demonstrate value, but also to Charcol for creating an environment where the adviser is empowered to provide a truly excellent service. Sarah Smith of money4dentists was second and Mary Waring of Positive Solutions was third.

Equity Release Adviser This category was particularly closely contested and all of the finalists impressed the judging

panel with their technical knowledge, professionalism and ethical approach to their trade. Many of the entrants in this category have come from a background of financial and/or mortgage advice and are able to deploy impressive background and interpersonal skills when advising consumers in this, the most sensitive of areas, of consumer financial advice. The winner was Simon Chalk of Mortgage Portfolio Services whose composed and knowledgeable approach was complemented by a client-focused business proposition that reflects the best that the independent advice sector has to offer. Mr Chalk was also named Overall Mortgage IFA of the Year. Ian Howarth of Parker Kelly was second in the equity release category.

Small Mortgage IFA Firm The clear winner in this category was Money4Dentists, who impressed the panel with a comprehensive report and proposal complemented by some in-depth analysis of associated themes.

Large Mortgage Adviser The quality of submissions in this category was very high indeed, and the eventual winner, Mortgage Force, edging into the winning position by merit of providing a thoughtful and clear submission that covered all of the required topics. London and Country Mortgages were placed very closely behind and are second, with the Thinc submission coming third.

Online All submissions in this category were of a very high standard and provide useful resources for consumers. The winner of this close-run category was the submission by London and Country, which was judged to be the most user friendly resource, with excellent content and comprehensive functionality over a broad range of product areas.

Given the high standard of all the entries we also record second for Charcol and third for BestInvest. Also commended is Advicemadesimple.

Market Roberts is the head of financial regulation at the ifs School of Finance and one of the judges

Large Mortgage IFA Firm of the Year

Mortgage Force



With its franchised business model and delivering face-to-face advice throughout the UK under its strong brand, Mortgage Force has taken pole position as Large IFA Firm of the Year.

Rob Clifford (pictured), chief executive of the Derby-based firm, has welcomed its accolade believing its success is that it operates an 'all sectors' strategy and which has not become overly exposed to any particular specialism, such as the sub-prime market.

Mr Clifford said: "We have grown relentlessly. In today's market, it is becoming clear that few companies are achieving a reasonable return on capital and delivering great service to consumers and a career for its staff. Our staying power is thanks to a clear strategy and an exceedingly strong parent group with extensive capital and resources."

Covering all ages and occupations, its 185 franchises across the UK are free to operate in any part of the residential market they wish to specialise in, with 40 staff

employed in compliance, audit and treating customers fairly roles across the group.

The success of its franchise recruitment programme has been responsible for some 45 per cent in turnover, together with the appointment of more than 50 new mortgage advisers during this period. In addition, it has secured a number of corporate partnerships, including Bradford & Bingley.

Mr Clifford did point out that greater attention is required to maintain controls within the business, to keep costs down and to ensure consistency. He added: "Clearly, if we decide to make a business-wide operational or technological change, it can be a decision with months of resource impact and tens of thousands of pounds, whereas much smaller firms can perhaps make decisions with fewer implications."

But optimistic Mr Clifford believes that brokers should also use the constantly changing market as an opportunity to really come into their own, encouraging consumers to seek a business such as theirs for expert, impartial advice.

Small Mortgage IFA Firm of the Year

Money4Dentists



Niche IFAs Money4Dentists prove that big is not always better, by taking a bite of success and coming out on top in the Small Mortgage IFA of the Year category.

The five-member team caters for the financial planning of dentists throughout the UK from purchasing their first practice to preparing for retirement.

Richard Lishman, principal for Money4Dentists, believes understanding its clients is paramount.

He said: "We believe in attention to detail. The expectations within our firm are very high and so are the expectations of our clients. They are highly educated people, so our focus is matching this high quality.

"The type of client focus is the quality of business we produce. This provides a model for us. I believe this brings out something positive.

"We do work within a niche market place and we get to know our clients within this. We know what their working lifestyles are, how they trained and how much they earn.

But it is not just about taking from lenders, it is about giving something back. We try and find a solution and problem solve."

Mr Lishman said: "The downside of being in such a niche market, is that it is a clique profession. With 32,000 registered dentists and 22,000 working dentists, word gets round very quickly. If one does not fit in with our model, then this could reflect badly on us. But on the other hand, this works well in our favour, in that word of mouth maintains and makes us more clients."

With the solid experience of two financial advisers, the firm also believes in moving with the times. Since August, the firm has worked in a paperless office focusing on its back office systems to indicate a positive move in technology.

Mr Lishman said: "We have noted that the market has affected business slightly, but there will always be a need for dentists and we will project more of the same."