

TOP 100 BROKERS

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DANIEL O'BRIEN**PFS Financial Services**

Bella Vista, NSW

Aggregator: **PLAN**

Total value of residential loans FY2016/17:

\$159,713,452

Total number of residential loans FY2016/17:

400

Daniel O'Brien is surprised and indeed "ecstatic" about his numbers, adding \$4m to his total in a year despite taking two months off and despite the impact of regulation. "With all these APRA changes people's borrowing capacities are down by 20–30%," O'Brien says. "Our loan sizes and volumes have been affected by that."

Borrowers face a myriad of challenges and O'Brien spells a number of them out. Some are well known, such as living expenses being judged in different ways; some less so, such as borrowers with tax-free allowances (for example healthcare professionals) not having these allowances factored in by the banks.

Submitting an application is rarely the final hurdle, O'Brien explains. "We're definitely finding that when we've satisfied their checklist they'll come back and not so much say 'no' but come back and ask for a whole bunch more stuff, which is really incentivising us to go away and go elsewhere."

PFS Financial Services' continued success is down to "the same thing that allows us to be successful every year, and that's tight systems and tight processes. We're 13 years in, so by now we've ironed out all the kinks."

This was recognised last year at the Australian Mortgage Awards, where PFS was named NAB Australian Brokerage of the Year in a huge achievement for what remains a small organisation.

Those tight systems and processes survive in large part thanks to experienced staff members, the two most senior of whom have been at the brokerage for 11 and seven years respectively. "By this point they know more about some things than me," O'Brien quips.

O'Brien puts a huge emphasis on the 'one-percenters': "things that are easy to do but easier not to do, and we choose to do them". That includes contacting clients at every stage of the loan process, which has another advantage: "If we're telling a client there's a delay it shows that we're in control, and they're comfortable and not calling us 10 times a day."

While O'Brien is considering software improvements for his brokerage, his focus remains on 'natural' growth. "We never strive to be cutting-edge; we just concentrate on the little things."



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JASON GUO**Centum Mortgage Group**

South Melbourne, Vic

Aggregator: **Vow Financial**

Total value of residential loans FY2016/17:

\$162,296,228

Total number of residential loans FY2016/17:

282

Remaining in the Top 10 this year is a tribute not only to Jason Guo's talents as a broker but also to his foresight. In January 2016 Guo made a major change to Centum Mortgage Group, tearing up the old 'conveyor belt' processing model and replacing it with a straight-through model, in which a single staff member handles applications from beginning to end. He also increased the paperwork his team demanded from clients as part of a general drive towards compliance.

Given the regulatory interventions that have occurred in the intervening two years, it's clear that Guo saw the signs of what was to come. With other brokerages finding their efficiency compromised as they struggle to respond to new requirements, Centum's has increased. "The employees have become more efficient, because they're more familiar with the procedures and structure," Guo says. His overall total has slipped only slightly from last year, and his average loan size has increased substantially.

"Because we'd changed the structure the year before, we'd already added more paperwork," Guo explains. The brokerage has since hired an overall compliance manager and has its own processing note explaining additional details about the loan, paralleling the major banks' drive for additional borrower details.

Guo cannot stop his investor clients reaching the ceiling on their residential borrowing capacities, but he can find them alternative strategies. One of these has been encouraging professional investors to consider investing in commercial property. "They've still got the money and want to invest it in the property market," Guo explains. "They can use the rental income to assist their commercial borrowing capacity; they can get a rental return and they have the potential for a capital gain as well." The brokerage's volumes have subsequently increased on the commercial side, while keeping clients happy.

Given that in 2016 Guo was named one of MPA's 'Young Guns', his rise has been astonishing: at 34 he's the youngest broker in the Top 10. Guo is confident that Centum can continue to grow. "From the current forecasting on our business, we already have a 10% settlement increase each month," he says, "so by the end of this year we're looking at about a 15–20% increase for the business."

