



# Shooting for the stars

A big change in Mark Childs' personal life meant he had less time to spend at the office but that didn't stop him taking out the NZMBA Broker of the Year award for 2009, writes Colleen Simpson

**M**ark Childs is one of those slightly exasperating people who seem to be able to spin more plates than the rest of us while making it all look easy. The problem with plate spinning is that eventually one begins to wobble, and that's a lesson that Childs, of Mortgage Link Wairarapa, has learnt of late.

Still in his early thirties, Childs has been a finalist in the NZMBA Broker of the Year awards three times, narrowly missing out in 2006 when he was runner up. However 2009 was his year to shine and he duly took out the national award.

The irony is that he achieved this professional milestone in a year when his personal circumstances changed dramatically and he made the decision to spend more time at home instead of at the office.

When his relationship with his partner ended six months ago, it marked a huge change in Childs' day-to-day life.

"I was trying to juggle everything that I was involved in previously but I had to make sacrifices. For example I had to give up a position on a sports society that I support," he says. "First and foremost I had to get myself sorted because if I wasn't right that would affect my kids. You do come out the other end so much stronger."

Since the split work has been moved to the back burner so he could help his three sons cope with the change in their family life.

As a single parent with a shared custody arrangement, Childs is now running his own home as well as managing the business and he willingly puts his hands up to say it's been tough.

Instead of long hours at the office, Childs has been leaving early to collect kids from school and do all the other things that single parents need to do.

Childs is a shoot for the stars kind of guy, having already

notched up an impressive list of personal, sporting and professional achievements.

He became a father at a young age and now has a teenager and nine-year-old twins, but somehow he managed to find time for sport and lots of it – he's represented the Wairarapa in both rugby and cricket at a senior level and even made it to the Hurricanes trials during the first year of Super 12 rugby.

Along the way he spent a decade in banking, built up a successful career as a broker and managed to enter a business partnership which is working wonderfully.

In fact, Childs has in the past said that the best business move he has made is to buy into the business which he did just nine months after taking up broking.

"On average, my weeks (now) are a little bit disjointed," he says. "I'm lucky enough to have good staff so I don't believe that service levels have gone down at all. I am doing fewer hours at the moment, the key thing is spending time with my kids, but the momentum will come back with regards to me being back in the office."

Experts have long been suggesting brokers work on the infrastructure of their businesses, encouraging them to build a saleable asset which could function without their presence.

So it is without doubt fortunate that Childs and his business partner Stephen Oldfield heeded that advice – his regular absences went unnoticed by clients who experienced the same service levels and turnaround times. "When I look at the business, things here still got done really well because of the systems and processes we have put in place," he says.

"If I'm away, I have other people who can step in and keep files going. Clients rely on me for advice but there are certainly other people here who can get them a mortgage. That's mostly what people are wanting but obviously we take it 20 steps further for them."

The CRM software Mortgage Link invested in has proved vital, as has the business' own systems.

For example, contact with new clients is structured. It begins with a 90 minute interview with Childs who endeavours to help clients identify their long-term financial goals.

The second appointment is more of a 'needs analysis' covering loans, structures as well as fire and general and house insurance. "We just print it out (the application) and do it for them," he says.

One of the aspects of his business which Childs feels helped him clinch the big prize for 2009 is that he has, for the last six months, charged fees for his services.

Childs comes from the school of thought which says if something comes for free then it is of no worth. "If you get something for free, what value do you perceive? This industry is evolving to a more professional level with regulation," he says. "If you look back 10 years ago, it was always a tight deal and it was hard to get through. But now you have good, quality clients who are also wanting advice."

Fees are currently purely transactional – \$250 plus GST for advice and successful service – but that is just a starting point, Childs says.

"It's gone down really well. I have had one objection in six months and that is all it was, an objection."

Childs says he and business partner Oldfield, who takes care of clients' financial planning requirements, have always been progressive, actively seeking ways in which they can improve what they have on offer.

Going forward, Childs says he and Oldfield have recognised being part of the Mortgage Link group helps get clients through the door, but there is now the opportunity – and challenge – to ring fence their client base.

"Our clients come in and we really look at them holistically," he says. "We can say 'here are the other professional services we offer, which package would you like?' Clients will effectively look at a menu and choose what package they want and get that specialised advice."

The NZMBA award is a great platform to market their business and Childs says he plans to squeeze everything out of it.

"It's big news in a small town," he says.