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PORTFOLIO DESPITE SETBACKS

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shows you how



PLUS

SMART FINANCE GUIDE

- Managing cash flow on multiple properties
- Choosing between fixed vs variable loans
- Using low-deposit loans to invest
- Financing regional properties

REVEALED!

Australia's most
trusted experts

p52

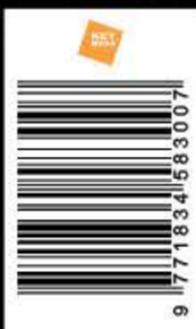
TAX

What to do when you
get audited by the ATO

p72

REAL LIFE

How Chris Shine built his
\$2.4m portfolio after a
marriage breakdown p64





Your Investment Property's 7th Annual Readers' Choice Awards offered you, our readers, the chance to nominate your most trusted advisors and agents. So who have you voted for?

In an industry infamous for being a stomping ground for sly operators ready to pounce on unsuspecting investors, knowing who to trust is a must.

So what better way to find out than by asking you, our readers, for your opinions on who has helped you the most on your investment journey and who you believe deserves your trust.

You are the ultimate judge of the quality of service you have received from the property professionals you've dealt with, and your overwhelming response has shown who's delivered above and beyond the call of duty and helped you achieve your goals.

We asked you to nominate your favourite experts in five different categories, including:



The results showed that you value commitment, integrity and inspiration from these experts. Without exception, the winners this year all displayed unwavering devotion to your success as property investors.

Thank you for all your efforts and contributions to this year's Readers' Choice Awards. We hope this will encourage more people in the industry to embrace these qualities.





PROPERTY INVESTMENT ADVISOR OF THE YEAR: Ben Kingsley, Empower Wealth

How important is it for investors – even the experienced ones – to engage an advisor?

Wealthy business people and families tend to make a point of getting expert advice to further build and create additional wealth, as do professional sportspeople. So, to me, it makes sense that anyone who wants to do well as an investor would seek out professional expertise to help them achieve that goal and maximise the value of their investments.

How prevalent are property scams at the moment, and how can you, as an investor, spot them?

Good times in the property market encourage all sorts of less-than-reputable operators to come out of their hiatus. As soon as they see a bit more activity in the

market they tend to pop up. This means that it is only natural that as property values go up, so too do the number of property scammers in operation.

When it comes to spotting scammers, you need to ask questions like: Who is this person actually working for – you, themselves, or on behalf of a developer or builder? Are they acting in my best interests? Are they giving independent advice? Is this person qualified to give that advice? How is this person getting paid and how much? And finally, is the fee that you are paying a fair representation of the value of the advice you are receiving? Essentially, it is all about establishing whether their advice is truly independent and whether it provides you with the best knowledge and information for your specific needs.

How do you ensure you're dealing with a reputable company? What are the signs to watch out for?

In terms of establishing whether a company is reputable, investors should find out whether the company is a member of a professional association, like Property Investment Professionals of Australia. The company should adhere to a strict code of conduct when it comes to disclosure and professional advice. And the client's interests should always be number one. Also, you should look at a company's reputation within the industry, and whether it has received any awards. Get testimonials; investigate what is said about the company in property forums and in the public arena. These are all good starting points when it comes to establishing how reputable a company is.

What are five tips that you would give to new investors before they make their first purchase?

1. Most inexperienced property investors make big mistakes, so start off by looking at your own abilities. You need to do a realistic and honest assessment of your property investment skills, knowledge and experience. And, from that assessment, you should be able to identify whether you need professional advice or help in pursuing property investment and building a good portfolio. Being honest with yourself is key! Too many people think they know property investing, but they really don't know what makes a great investment area or investment-grade property.
2. Make sure that you have the cash flow to afford a property investment both now and in the future.
3. Think about what type of property investment returns you are seeking. You are usually going to be looking for either good capital growth or high rental yields (which often means less capital growth). So you need to think about what is going to best suit your situation and what you can afford. And you need to understand the investment returns that you need to achieve, both short and long term.

4. Always get specialist advice from a relevant professional. So when it comes to tax, go to a qualified tax accountant. When it comes to investment, go to a qualified property investment advisor. When it comes to making a purchase, go to a licensed buyer's agent.
5. Understand your investment horizons. Establish what your property investment goals are and how they link to your overall personal and financial goals. Think about how your investment goals correspond with living a fulfilling life, and make sure that they don't detract from it.

How does it feel to win this award?

It's fantastic – both for me and for my team. To be a great property investment advisor you need to have an excellent team around you to do the sort of property analysis and advisory work that we do. So for me this is really a team award, rather than an individual award.

I'm really passionate about property investing, and lucky to be able to come to work every day and do something I love doing. It is a huge responsibility playing with our clients' money and financial futures, but it's also so rewarding knowing that you are helping to change people's lives in a positive financial way. 🏠



**Runner-up:
Ryan Crawford,
Crawford Property
Group**

Ryan started out in the field of property investment – as an investor himself – over a decade ago. As he built his own highly successful portfolio, he discovered that he really enjoyed helping other people achieve their property goals and dreams. This led him to start the CPG, which has a focus on ensuring investors get good returns and a passive income from their property investments.

“It is great to be able to share information and resources with our clients and watch them implement what we have taught them to become successful investors in their own right. It is hugely rewarding work to be doing,” Ryan says.

“I am very focused on helping people, so this award feels particularly good as it means that our clients are happy with, and finding value from, our service. The fact that I started out as an investor myself also makes it feel pretty special.”

What readers said

“My wife and I first met Ben in 2012 and straight away felt a level of confidence and comfort with him. I can be sceptical at the best of times, and without reference immediately felt that Ben's demeanour, experience and knowledge would serve our best interests. Importantly, we felt he would be very easy to deal with and that would make the entire process more enjoyable. We then employed his services to devise a property investment plan that we believe has our future well set – we are very happy with it and progressing well.

“Ben and the Empower Wealth team took the time (more than we anticipated) to properly understand our goals and to work through a plan that would best suit us. Ben operates in a highly professional manner but also speaks at a level that allows the uneducated to understand and follow, and that meant we had even greater confidence in what was being prepared.

“I think Ben is a highly credible person foremost and certainly has a great reputation which is clearly having a positive impact on Empower Wealth. Ben also shows a willingness to go above and beyond and as a result we feel genuinely valued as a client rather than just a number. I would regard Ben as the best advisor (of any type) that we have dealt with. I have already endorsed Ben to friends/family and will continue to do so.”

– **Richard Henebery**

What readers said

“Ryan is a very inspiring man who puts 100% into everything he does. Not only does he talk the talk, but he also walks the walk. And he has willingness to share his success stories in a way which will help others. All in all, if I could be even half of the person he is today I would be a very happy investor!”

– **Danielle Cartwright**



BUYER'S AGENT OF THE YEAR:

Nathan Birch, B Invested

How long have you been a buyer's agent, and what do you love most about your job?

I have been a buyer's agent for about four to five years now. I fell into it because I started making videos about investing and people started to watch them. Then people started asking for my help – and it all went from there.

I enjoy helping other people achieve their property goals. I don't do this work for money; I do it for the satisfaction of helping other people become successful in property too.

So, on their behalf, I buy below market value and make sure that they get equity from the deal. I buy the same type of properties for my clients that I

buy for myself, and that has made me successful as an investor. To do so, I have spent a vast amount of time building up relationships and networks that my clients can tap into to help effectively build up their portfolios.

How do you spot a bad buyer's agent?

There are a lot of people out there who are effectively spruiking granny flats or other 'investment' wares. It is important to watch out for them. You need to do your research on any buyer's agent you are thinking of using, because you want to make sure that they are not just selling you fluff. You want to see results!

So know what you are looking for. Find out how the buyer's agent goes

about buying properties. It is good if they are an investor themselves, but look at what they have invested in and how their portfolio has done. Ask them what they have paid for properties and why. Establish how their system works.

There are many buyers' agents who are effectively glorified salespeople, so you want to be careful about the advice that you get and take. A reputable buyer's agent should have an office. You don't want a fly-by-nighter. How can you trust someone if you don't know where they are based?

Also, watch out for glossy brochures that are selling you all sorts of promises and opportunities. Things need to make sense; the numbers need to stack up. So

do your due diligence and make sure you know how much any deal will cost you all up. A reputable buyer's agent will be able to provide you with all the necessary data so that you don't overstretch yourself and you get a good deal.

What are three areas in Australia you would you say have good potential for capital growth in the medium to long term, and why?

The East Coast is the place to look, for supply and demand reasons. Sydney still has potential, although it has heated up after being cool for some time. Over the next 12 to 24 months, I would say the Gold Coast and Brisbane. Those markets have been held back for a long time, but now they are starting to move. So Southeast Queensland, even Cairns – those areas are all starting to pick up and are looking good for the next few years.

What are three areas in Australia you think are overrated as investment hotspots, and why?

There are two market sectors that I would advise against buying in. One is brand-new, off-the-plan properties, because foreign investors can only buy such properties, which means that such developments sell out quickly at premium prices, but they are not good investment stock. The other is mining towns, because they are too subject to the vagaries of the mining industry and, as such, they are not good investment stock either.

Who is one person who has inspired you to be the best you can be in your profession?

To be honest, I don't really have a particular influence or mentor in the property field. I have always done my own thing and made my own decisions. This has worked out favourably for me. And now I'm in a position to open up my resources to other people, which is great.

How does it feel to win this award?

Being a busy and successful investor and buyer's agent is a reward in itself. But I am humbled by winning this award. I feel it shows we are doing well for our clients. And it feels really cool to know that our clients think well of us and the service we provide, and have voted for us because of that. 🏠



What readers said

“Nathan is a great role model for young people. Day after day he works to help others achieve their dreams, by sharing his wins and showing others how to do the same. He is real and genuine – your everyday bloke who started from nothing – which makes him really accessible for so many people. The best part is that Nathan’s philosophy is ‘win win’.

“Nathan works around the clock for his clients, taking calls day and night, and supports them through every step of the process.”

– *Kristen Ellul*



**Runner-up:
Miriam Sandkuhler,
Property Mavens**

With a background in the financial services industry, Miriam was interested in property from a young age. Starting at 23, she began building her own portfolio, but some bad advice along the way impacted on her progress. This experience contributed to her becoming passionate about the advocacy side of the property industry, and ultimately led to her starting her own buyer's agency.

“I see the devastation that has been wreaked on investors who have been led down the garden path by people who don't have their best interests at heart. It can ruin people financially,” Miriam says. “I am absolutely passionate about protecting buyers and ensuring that they don't make a bad purchase or investment decision.

“As a buyer's agent, I feel my clients place a huge amount of trust in me, because it is their future security and happiness that is at stake. In order to successfully assist my clients' hopes and dreams, I live and breathe my work every day ... To be recognised by my clients makes me proud and makes it all worthwhile.”



What readers said

“Miriam exceeded our expectations as our buyer's advocate. She continually kept us abreast of her progress, from beginning to end. She negotiated terms on our behalf that were included in the contract of sale to ensure our protection, and referred a property management company that have proven to be good.

“It was a great, swift and successful experience and Miriam is an absolute pleasure to work with. We will engage her again when the time comes to purchase another investment property.”

– *Yelena Constantinou*

MORTGAGE BROKER OF THE YEAR:

Jane Slack-Smith, Investors Choice Mortgages



What do you love about being a mortgage broker?

My journey as a mortgage broker actually started in my previous career as a mining engineer. I found that, by applying skills from the mining industry to my private property investments, I had unearthed a successful formula for low-risk property investing.

At the time I was an engineer specialising in explosives, and, as you can imagine, developing risk strategies is central to this role. After five years of turning my own small deposit of \$45,000 into a multimillion-dollar property portfolio by using similar risk strategies, I realised that by sharing my strategy I could help others do the same. By becoming a mortgage broker I could devote my days to helping others succeed in their investments and achieve the lifestyle they've always dreamt of.

When I see my clients succeed, and be able to repeat their success, that's when I'm most proud of my work.

What are the biggest challenges for investors accessing finance in the current market?

There's no doubt that lenders have tightened up their credit scoring, so keeping your credit file clean is critical. Another problem we often see in this fast-moving market is properties being

undervalued. This is caused by valuers failing to record recent sales fast enough. When possible we like to go the extra mile and provide details on recent sales to valuers so that we can get the right valuation the first time.

Finally, people using the wrong lender may run the risk of reducing their ability to access equity. Building equity to be able to access it is the key to growing a property portfolio, and getting this wrong can stop any investor in their tracks. Being with the right lender and knowing their policies allows you to avoid any unnecessary difficulties.

What are your top tips for managing cash flow in the current market?

Start with the end game in mind and choose a lender (and often lenders) who can assist in building your portfolio. But to choose the right lender you need to know your numbers and select an investment strategy that is right for you, before you develop your specific buying criteria first. Once you know your goal and how you want to go about getting there, then we find a lender to suit.

Second, I always suggest creating a buffer by borrowing more than you need, just as a bit of extra security in case something goes wrong, like you lose your job or tenant.

I also recommend using an offset account against non-deductible debt,

ie your home loan, and, finally, to have all your loans set up as interest only, even your home, whilst you are building your portfolio.

Find a lender who will give you a 10-year interest-only term, or roll over for another five-year interest only term without the need to reassess your application or hit your credit file a second time.

What are the biggest mistakes investors make when applying for a loan?

One thing that could set investors back when trying to grow a portfolio is cross-collateralisation, ie the combining of one mortgage registered against two or more security properties. Focusing on rates can also limit portfolio growth, as can being with a lender whose policies don't match your future needs.

You're also passionate about renovation. What are three common mistakes you see investors make when they attempt one?

This is easy: location, location, location. The best renovated property in a place where no one wants to live will not create wealth. It's as simple as that.

Another common error is not understanding pricing disparity, ie the difference between renovated and unrenovated properties. This clearly tells you if there is a profit to be made.

Finally, not sticking to your renovation plan and budget.

How does it feel to win this award?

I actually won this award five years ago and I can still remember receiving the call. I was covered in paint as I was in the final stages of a renovation. I was so thrilled, I even did a happy dance, paintbrush and all! I feel the

same excitement winning today.

When I won the first time I took the opportunity to look back at the most successful clients during those five years. It became obvious to me that it was those with a clear goal and strategy and who had done their research; they were the ones growing their equity. That's when I really began investing in learning how to pass on my knowledge and this 'success structure' to my clients. This integration of education and resources to assist clients in finding where to buy is why we have so many repeat and successful investor clients.

Winning again has shown me that my ongoing investment in providing extra resources for my clients, and my decision to concentrate on giving even more value, has been worth it. I know we do things differently, but I also know that our clients get different results. I let those results speak for themselves. 🏠

What readers said

"I found the Investors Choice website one Sunday afternoon, being confused with all the options and non-options available to me from lenders. I phoned ICM expecting to get a recording and leave a message to be contacted during working hours – not the case. To my surprise, not only was my call answered on a Sunday afternoon, it was answered by the director of ICM, Jane Slack-Smith.

I explained my situation in the hope of getting some good, honest, straight-talking advice. After 10 minutes of listening intently to my plight, Jane broke her silence and advised me of the best options available, some of which I had never heard of. We both made notes; Jane emailed hers to me so I wouldn't forget the critical points for me to take to my lender the next day. She also arranged to phone me the next day to further discuss and ensure we had the right property in the right place at the right price. During this phone call I realised she had, at her own expense researched the area, property and price being asked, and advised I was on track, that my choice had ticked all the right boxes, and produced the data to support her view.

"This information gave me the confidence to move forward with the deal. She also added I should complete my business dealings with the bank representative I was currently dealing with because ethically that would be the right thing to do. And I will this time. But needless to say, next time I will be contacting the most knowledgeable, ethical and hardworking brokerage firm I have found to date."

– **Stephen Taylor**



**Runner-up:
Ken Gibson,
Trilogy Investment
Property Funding**

Ken Gibson's passion for property began in 1978, when at the age of 22 he purchased his first property as his PPOR. When this later became his investment property, the ease with which it achieved real capital growth made Ken realise the great value of investing as a means of wealth creation.

After working in banking for 21 years, first at junior level and later as senior branch manager, he decided a change in direction was due. In 1999 he ventured into mortgage broking, initially owning and operating his own franchise before moving to Trilogy in 2009.

"This decision has seen me flourish, and that allows me to provide a much greater level of service to my clients, that I never achieved within the banking sector," he says.

"I was really chuffed to receive the award, and sincerely thank those who voted for me, and *Your Investment Property* magazine."

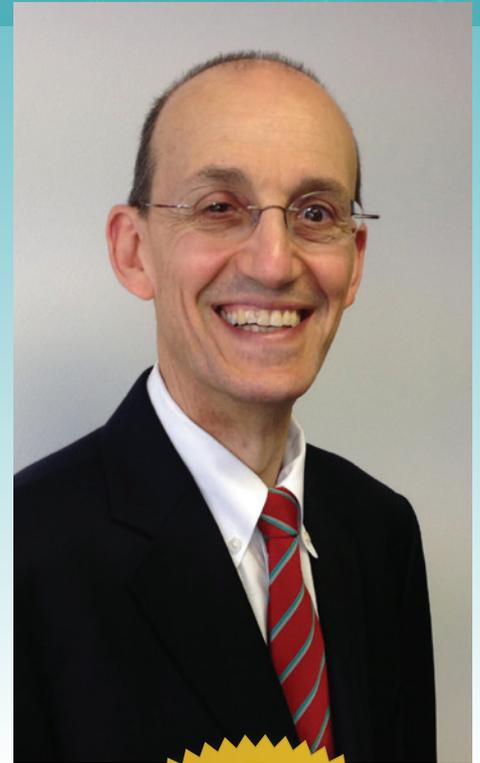
What readers said

"Ken was very professional and extremely helpful. He explained things thoroughly and was always available to assist any time we required. We would use him and the company again and definitely recommend him to anyone."

– **Cathryn Anderson**

TAX SPECIALIST/ ACCOUNTANT OF THE YEAR:

Shukri Barbara, Property Tax Specialists



What do you love most about your job?

I love meeting and talking with people. Understanding their particular circumstances and way of thinking helps us be creative with solutions that suit them and their objectives in life, as well as wealth creation.

What are the advantages of having a tax specialist on your team?

Having a property tax specialist on the team of advisors will help investors avoid costly mistakes throughout the journey and the transaction process, from planning phase, pre-commitment, to purchase and later sale. They are someone who is not emotionally involved to check your ideas and plans, comparing them to other clients who are in the same market and advising on the tax implications and cash flows – enabling better decisions.

What are the top five biggest tax traps investors should avoid at all costs?

Cash flow: Borrowing to extremes, not allowing for bad times or loss of an income with the birth of a child.
Advice: Asking for advice after a contract is signed, or calling up for advice one to two days before an auction.
Ownership structures: Setting up structures without rationale or reason. Understand why it is to be set up and how it works.

SMSF: Not understanding the implications, costs and trustee responsibilities; not having proper documentation.

Interest deductibility: Repaying loans instead of using offset facilities to reduce interest expense.

What do you think will happen to rules regarding negative gearing in the next five years and beyond?

Investors usually adapt to any changes over time. However, what government is brave enough to introduce a change which causes short-term pain to 1.9m investors? With adverse changes the risk is that valuations will be less than the loan values, threatening share prices of banks with major investments in the housing loan market, subsequently impacting on the whole economy and tax revenue. My prediction is that there will be no changes over the next five years. After that, changes have to be signalled at least 25–30 years ahead or accompanied with some other compensation.

How can an investor choose the right tax expert to work with?

Meet and talk to them. Someone with life experience better understands family situations, the stage of life they are at, ambitions for success, retirement, etc. They are someone

What readers said



“Shukri provided me with clear, concise advice on a duplex I am about to build on an existing property I have owned for many years. I spoke to a couple of other accountants and one seemed to have no idea and the other left me questioning his competence in general.

“I was referred to Shukri by a friend and I am glad I found him. Shukri explained all the tax implications and the tax treatment of all the expenses to me, as well as giving me an outline of the record-keeping I will need to maintain throughout the process.”

– Omar Moujalli

with whom a longer-term relationship can be developed, who will continue to understand your goals.

Explaining complex issues in simple language that can be understood is of great comfort and usually comes with practice and experience. Experienced property tax specialists are dealing with people in similar situations all the time. They help clients avoid costly mistakes.

They are qualified, with membership of the appropriate professional bodies, such as CPA Australia, the Tax Institute and others, which ensures they are up to date with the latest technical changes. Membership of Property Investment Professionals of Australia is also an advantage.

What are your top five tips for investors on how to maximise their tax benefits for 2015?

1. Prepay expenses in June, including rates, repairs and maintenance, strata levies, cleaning, etc.
2. Keep a record of your travel to inspect or maintain the property or collect rent.
3. Have a quantity surveyor's report to claim depreciation on building and plant and equipment.
4. Keep records to claim all expenses, especially small items.
5. Minimise 'bad' interest by using an offset facility against the main residence loan to store any spare cash.

What are some of the most common tax issues investors contact you for advice on?

Apart from asking 'what's deductible and what's not', the tax issues investors seek help with most depends on what stage of life and what stage of the investment journey they are on.

Investors who are young, or are just starting the journey, are looking to understand the tax rules and set themselves up correctly with appropriate ownership structures to maximise their benefits, and minimise their tax and the cost of any mistakes. An example is: should they acquire the new property in a trust structure, or should they buy one main residence or several IPs.

Investors who are older are looking to minimise their tax liability as they plan to exit investments (minimising capital

gains), or ensure they are producing positive income for retirement.

Investors between the above two are looking for support and advice to help them make the right decisions, or to test their assumptions, or to just talk about an idea as they sail through or as their circumstances change. Some examples include deciding which property in the portfolio will have minimum tax and maximum cash flow on sale; or the tax implications of subdividing and developing a site, renovating or constructing a granny flat.

If there was one tax tip every investor should remember, what would it be?

One of the mottos I learned in relation to tax was 'The more you realise how difficult it is, the easier it gets'.

If you understand how difficult some

things are, then you pay more attention to them by getting expert advice and/or learning more about them.

Because each person's circumstances are different, there is no one tax tip that fits all people. However, it is always best to discuss investment intentions with your property tax specialist before committing to a property investment, to find out if it can be done better – for example, using an offset type loan instead of a principal and interest type, or noting that the relevant date for CGT is the contract date, not the settlement.

How does it feel to win the award?

Not only am I honoured, but I am humbled by and grateful to all those who nominated me. A sincere thank you as I continue to help you succeed and achieve your goals. 🏠



**Runner-up:
David Shaw,
WSC Group**

After spending 15 years working as a chartered accountant in the corporate world, David was sick of slaving to build wealth for someone else. So he went into public practice and made a commitment

to spend one day a week on his own wealth building. Nearly 15 years later, he has his own portfolio of 30 properties and is one of the property sector's most recognised tax specialists.

These days it is helping other people create and build their own wealth – by making good use of the tax system and maximising benefits – that motivates David. "There are a lot of clients who need holistic advice, because it is not a one-size-fits-all system," he says. "And it is very important for them to have someone who understands the system as well as their needs. Therefore we strive to provide specific and personalised advice for our clients."

David already has a proud record of success in *Your Investment Property's* Readers' Choice Awards. However, he feels humbled to come in as runner-up this year. "The nature of the work we do means that we only exist because of our clients. So a win like this, which is all due to our clients voting for us, makes us feel very grateful and thankful."

What readers said

"David and his team have guided us from the very beginning of our investment journey. They give us the confidence to strive for our goals while at the same time keeping our feet firmly on the ground. They are professional but also approachable when we have questions, and keep their finger on the pulse with regard to all aspects of property investment from a taxation perspective.

"Most importantly, they have earned our loyalty and trust."
– **Sally Petersen**

REAL ESTATE AGENT OF THE YEAR:

Ian Hosking Richards, Rocket Property Group



How long have you been investing, and what do you love about it?

I have been investing for 15 years now. I think that property is the ideal investment vehicle as there are so many ways that you can use it to create wealth. A well-researched, well-located property has the potential to pay for itself, go up in value and give hassle-free ownership.

The key to growing your asset base quickly is leverage, and as property can be highly leveraged it can help you create wealth over relatively short periods of time. Whilst few investments are guaranteed, property is relatively low-risk, and for novice investors the perceived risk is probably much greater than the actual risk.

The favourable tax treatment of investment properties for Australian resident taxpayers is also a nice bonus, and one that is not available to citizens of most countries. The fact that you can get a tax rebate for a property that is actually giving you a profit seems almost too good to be true, but it applies nevertheless. Whilst you wouldn't purchase an investment property solely to get a tax rebate, any contribution that the government is willing to make to my cash flow is gratefully received.

What are five tips you would give to investors to get the most out of their real estate agent?

1. If you want to become a successful investor, then choosing an agent

who is also an experienced property investor with a large portfolio should help. But make sure they have used the same strategy as you want to. If you want a hands-off 'set and forget' strategy, then make sure that your real estate agent has used this same strategy to accumulate wealth.

- Engaging an agent who has a national perspective will allow you to access a geographically diverse range of properties to suit your needs at any given time, and get recommendations that complement your existing portfolio and lower the overall risk. Unfortunately, many real estate agents have only localised knowledge and listings. Whilst this may be of value if you are looking to purchase an owner-occupied home in their locality, it will be of less relevance to the investor market. Most investors are time-poor, and sourcing a new agent every time they want to buy in a new area is time-consuming. An agent who can provide a one-stop shop can be of great value.
- Communicate to your real estate agent exactly what you are looking for. If your expectations are unrealistic your agent could suggest areas where you may need to compromise in order to move forward. Do not hold out for the 'perfect' property because it rarely exists. Hardly any novice investor is 100% sure when they take the



What readers said

"Although Ian is the principal in his company, he is very accessible. Any emails or phone messages I have left for him have been answered within an hour. He loves answering questions and deals with them in a patient and thorough manner.

"Ian always looks for the best outcome for his clients and has a no pressure approach which makes clients feel very comfortable dealing with a person of his calibre.

"Ian will make a very worthy winner in this category and very well deserved."

– John Ram

plunge, so if it ticks most of your boxes be prepared to take a leap of faith and do it anyway.

4. Let your agent know how much communication you would like and in what format. What is the best time of day to reach you? Do you prefer email or phone? Do you want a weekly update or do you need to be kept in the loop every time there is an enquiry/event? A good agent should find this information out quite quickly, but it doesn't hurt to spell it out. A lot of problems can occur when there is perceived to be either too much or too little communication to the client, so it is important to get the balance right.
5. Choose a real estate agent based on their documented performance, qualifications and industry awards, rather than the agent who will promise you the most or charge you the least.

Trust is a big issue with real estate agents. How do you go about building that?

I think that most people are fairly intuitive and have a good sense of when people are being genuine and honest and when people are being fake. Real estate agents who are genuinely interested in their clients and spend the time to find out exactly what their clients want, and go out of their way to help their clients get exactly what they want, will always shine through. If they do the right thing by their clients, then the rewards will follow. Those who have more of a short-term commercial focus and are more interested in flogging a product rather than helping the client find a solution to their problem will not thrive in today's real estate industry.

What are your top five tips for dealing with a property manager?

1. Be very clear on exactly what your expectations are, and communicate them to your property manager. Get their agreement. Hold them accountable.
2. Don't just contact your property manager when there is a problem. Maintain regular contact so that you keep up to date with changing market conditions and build a strong relationship.
3. Do not have unrealistic expectations. Good property managers will get you the best outcome, even in soft markets, if you are prepared to meet the market. If conditions are soft when you are looking for a new tenant, you may need

to drop the rent. Demanding that your property manager find a new tenant immediately at the same rent as previously is not helpful to either party.

4. If you have taken the time to select the best property manager you will need to spend less time 'managing' them. A mature, experienced and professional property manager will be worth their weight in gold, so once you have selected the right one, allow yourself to be guided by their experience and good judgment.
5. Always make sure that you can get out of a managing agent's agreement in the shortest time possible, just

in case the relationship is no longer working for you.

How does it feel to win this award?

In the past five years I have won the award four times and finished runner-up once, yet I was still surprised and delighted when I got the phone call to say I had won again. As always it is a team effort and I believe that the consistency of our appearances in the awards is a testament to all my staff and what a great job they do. I am also so grateful to all our investors who actually took the time to nominate me. I really do appreciate it. 🏠



**Runner-up:
Rachelle Pitt,
Professionals Belmore**

It was actually a stroke of luck that Rachelle became involved in property management. After completing high school and a traineeship in business administration,

Rachelle discovered that a local real estate agency was looking for a property assistant to work with their property management team.

"At the time I had no knowledge of real estate or property management, let alone just what it involved," she says.

It was this position that she accepted 18 years ago that propelled her interest in property management, and she is just as excited now as she was back then.

"It was this position that sparked my ever-growing interest and passion for the industry. Throughout my career, I have committed myself to providing my clients a personalised and professional service," she says.

"Winning this award tells me that my hard work and diligence over the years is appreciated, and to be recognised as one of the industry's best individuals is a truly rewarding experience."

What readers said

"We recently took the plunge and purchased an investment property. As busy professionals we knew that we would have very little time to spend managing a property, and it was extremely important to us to find a property manager who understood our needs. Rachelle was on to the case straight away. She quickly inspected the property and recognised that a paint job would enhance our likelihood of finding the right tenant at the rent we were hoping for. She arranged a painter and had photographs and an advertisement prepared within a few days. After only two openings, she had found an excellent tenant who moved in the following week. The entire leasing process was very streamlined and easy from our end.

"We could not be more delighted with Rachelle. I don't think she could have made this any easier than she already did."

– **Alesha and Peter Goodey**