

Speaker 1: Welcome to Elite Broker with your host Alex Whitlock.

Alex: Welcome to Elite Broker. I'm your host Alex Whitlock. Joining me today is as usual is my friend and colleague James Mitchell, the Editor at Large on The Adviser and Mortgage Business.

James: Good to be here, Alex.

Alex: Today, we have a broker that has already achieved quite significant accolades. His name is George Samios. He is principal of MADD Loans. George is still a young broker, but he has already achieved quite significant gains in just a few years. Started out a few years ago as a mobile bank manager with Bank West. Within a couple of years, he was running his own business. He's had various accolades, from hitting the Elite Business Writers three years in a row, to picking up various national awards.

James: Yeah, George runs MADD Loans out of his office in Brisbane. Unfortunately, we don't have him in the North Sydney studio with us, but we do have him on the line. George are you there?

George: Yes, I am. How are you?

James: Good. It's James Mitchell here, and I've got Alex Whitlock with us, as well.

Alex: Hey George how are you going? Thanks for your time.

George: Gentlemen, I'm always good. How are you?

Alex: Good. Not too bad at all. Well, I say that. James is suffering with the flu, and I'm recovering from a hernia operation. Otherwise, we're absolutely tiptop.

George, thanks very much for taking time out to join us. I'm not sure if you're familiar with Elite Broker. It's a new podcast that we have put together for brokers out there. I'm particularly keen to speak to brokers who have been hardworking, successful, and also innovative. Certainly, you're somebody who's stood out in all of those areas, so thought we'd have a chat to you and just see if we can get some understanding as to how you've managed to get to where you are now.

George, I'd like to kick off, and I'm not familiar with you, so if you could help me out. I know you started out with Bank West some years ago. At the age of 20, what took you into mortgage lending?

George: I come from a real estate background, so from the age out of school, 18 to 20, I was in real estate, working in the suburb West End, which is a couple of [inaudible 00:02:03] from the city of Brisbane. Door knocking, cold calling, doing some cool marketing, doing some funny advertising, trying to sell properties which weren't so appealing. It was happening. I loved it. I loved the property.

Then, I had an opportunity to work for Bank West when I was 20, as a mobile bank manager. I had no experience in home loans, and zero experience in finance at all, but I had really good determination and work ethic, and obviously, an anything's achievable attitude, which led me to an interview. Bank West was looking to expand on the east coast. What happened was, I got dressed up, passed the phone interviews, had the meeting, 20-year-old lad, [missed 00:02:38] my old boss. Pretty much told her that I

was determined to be the number one in that role, and that I would definitely become the number one for her team in the whole company in the mobile banking manager role.

She said, "You don't know anything about home loans."

I said, "Yes, but I'm young. I've got no bad habits, and you can mold me into whatever you want to mold me into."

Alex: George, you were obviously successful in getting that role, and I know that you were clearly very good at what you did. Just tell me a little bit about what they had you doing straight away, and what your learnings were in terms of dealing with the customers.

George: I went straight into home loans. I'd go get in my car. I was getting on my laptop. I'd had three weeks training in their corporate city whatever, and they taught me how to run home loans. They explained what OBRs were, lending mortgage. They explained what the basics are. I still appreciate the opportunity I was given back then because it's built the backbone of what I do today. I believe mortgage brokering can be taught to anyone. It's the ethics, morals, and hardworking attitude you have to have to actually be successful. I think, if you really want to learn anything, you can. Especially back then. I didn't know anything, but I knew that it was not going to be too hard for me to learn it.

James: You were working with your mother for a time, weren't you?

George: Yeah. I was working with Helen, Mum, who now works with me at MADD.

James: She works with you now, does she?

George: Yeah, she works at MADD. She's been here for three years now.

James: Fantastic.

George: She's got a day off today. She has Wednesdays off now, which is fantastic. She was definitely an integral part of MADD's success. Worth having Mum there.

James: That's good.

George: Very hardworking, as well, and everyone loves dealing with her.

Yes, I worked for Bank West for two years. In fact, I became what I said I was going to become, which then gave me the confidence to start doing my own thing. When I was working for the one bank, I only had one product, one policy. I felt I was giving my clients an adjusted service. I couldn't promise them some of the best deals. I couldn't always satisfy my clients because sometimes the bank wouldn't approve their loans. Yet, other banks would. It hurt that I couldn't do the right thing. That's when I decided to explore mortgage brokering, and thank God I did that.

Alex: George, without knowing a lot about what's involved in mobile bank management, you were clearly doing something at Bank West that the others at Bank West weren't doing to get you to that number one spot. What do you think was the X factor that you had to win more clients and to get more loans approved?

George: What I did was, I treated it like my own little business. When I had the clients, I really gave them my time of day. I gave them the knowledge that I know about property, that I know about trying to pay off the loan faster, loan structure. I gave people my time, and people appreciate that. Those people aren't a number to me. Even though, when you work for big organizations, don't necessarily want you to just write more and more. In the start, from day one, everyone I saw and spoke to, I spent time with and really put all my effort in to try and make sure they understand exactly what's going on. People appreciate that.

When I'm with someone, I always mute my phone. Vince just rang me a second ago with the verdict. They've always got my undivided attention. The meeting's just between me and them. I've got my whiteboard. I'm very visual. I like to explain everything 100%. I think people appreciate that, and they also want to have a really good experience. When you have a really good experience, you want to tell everyone. Pretty much what happened was, when I started my business ... I've really a massive network here in Brisbane. I've got friends and family, but now that I'm out there and seeing people, those want to refer you to everyone. If you go to a good restaurant, you're going to tell everyone about that restaurant. It's the same thing with mortgage brokering.

James: That's very true.

Alex: George, I'd just like to go back to your early days in brokering, but first, could you just give us a snapshot of the business right now? What are you looking at in terms of your 2016 volumes? How many people do you have working with you? Just give us a quick overview of what the size and scale of the business is.

George: Now, with three full-time analysts working for me ... My mom is number one. I've got another person called Glen, another one called Nicole, both from the banking industry. I'm the only mortgage broker, but I have a good back end team. I think it's vital, that people need to do that. It's a really good system, automation, processes, and procedures. Daily huddles.

Every morning we go through all the files. We're having record [inaudible 00:06:46] this month's schedules, we should be cutting about \$19.5 million. The 2016 financial year, I think we settled at \$150 million in resi lines, 150-something. For me, I think it was \$40 or \$50 in commercial.

I now have a really good team behind me, I have the ability to work on commercial a bit more. Which is awesome. I've been getting a couple of bigger files across, and I can start exploring my old clients. I never touched the commercial side of things because I believe in doing one thing and doing it properly. Now that I've got the back end support of my awesome staff, I've the ability to spend some more time now doing some other stuff. Which is, for example, commercial finance, and stuff like that.

Alex: That's a pretty substantial business for yourself with three people working with you. That's very, very good volumes.

George: Another good thing is, when I manage to have a holiday ... A couple of months ago I was on a three-and-a-half week holiday. Greece was beautiful.

Alex: Very nice.

George: Helen, my mum, got to have a five week holiday. I've got the business, now, where I'm not reliant upon 100%. I can actually take breaks. That's another awesome thing that's happened this year is that I've had the ability to go on holiday.

Alex: That's good.

James: Fantastic.

George: Whereas before, in the start, I was doing half of loan, but I couldn't have a holiday. I spent a lot of time on my processes and procedures and training and getting things to happen, not necessarily without me being there. If that makes sense?

Alex: Yeah, absolutely.

James: I just want to ask a little bit about the marketing aspect of your business. You've been a huge force in terms of getting the MADD brand out there. You've picked up a bunch of awards, Better Business, especially. Obviously, you're in the Elite Broker ranking for the last three years, so you're definitely pretty formidable in terms of your successes. In terms of that marketing, what I wanted to ask about was your relationship with Vince.

George: Yes! A customer of mine. That's how it started. I'm a big fan of his [inaudible 00:08:32] and obviously a comedian. I think he'd be a good brand ambassador. A couple of years ago, he took that onboard. Now he does our commercials. Every year we do a new commercial, and we launch out in the Brisbane market. We do it on social media, been on TV. We're looking at doing some billboard and the back of buses advertising, at the moment. We're currently in negotiations with the marketing company. I wouldn't mind getting a dozen buses in Brisbane with the cool marketing campaign. People's call to action is to compare their loans. Come see us, and we can compare it for them. Using Vince's humor as a brand ambassador, and then, of course, we want to do the billboards, as well.

Alex: George, that's excellent. Again, reiterating three people supporting you with volumes of around \$150 million in terms of residential, and another \$40 - \$50 million in terms of commercial. That's pretty impressive.

George, they're big volumes. That's obviously going to generate quite a significant amount of revenue. In terms of getting Vince onboard, you're obviously spending money on your marketing. You've got very different view, I think, to other brokers that might have a couple of people working with them. Can you tell us, what are you committing to spend around your marketing, advertising, and so forth?

George: People always ask me, "George, what's your return investment when you do something and so on?" Of course, every single client that comes to my business, I know exactly where they're from. Our number one source of business is referrals. I believe that you need to back yourself and believe in yourself. If you want to keep pushing yourself to the next level, you got to spend money in your business. You can't just leave it go. I wouldn't spend a humongous amount of money on marketing, but I definitely still, every year, invest in commercial.

People always call me, constantly, from marketing companies. "George, billboards ..." I meet up with them. I learn about how much these things cost. I do up the deal and, "You know what, for that sort of amount of money, I may as well try it and see how it goes." You do get good feedback. Return investment? All I can say is, I think last financial year, we did \$109 mil resi. Now, we've gone to \$150. Plus, I've done a lot more commercials. All I can say is we're definitely growing at a good rate. I believe that the marketing's got something to do with it.

Alex: Look, I've moved into publishing. I've sold advertising for 20 years, and it's something I believe in very, very strongly. At The Adviser, we have clients that spend regularly with us and they get a good return investment. If you ask them to break it up into exactly what they get in terms of every dollar spent, it's very hard to do, but you do get a return on your investment from your advertising. If you're in the market for buying advertising, whether it's billboards, TV, or whatever, there're always bargains out there. If you become quite shrewd at dealing with the people who do the selling, you can get some very, very good deals there.

George: Yeah. It's not as expensive as everyone thinks. A billboard is quite cheap, really, in comparison to what you're achieving. You're achieving thousands of potential people who can see you. I believe that we've really got a good online presence on social media. We're constantly, everyday, putting up stuff on Instagram and Facebook. We're doing the Brisbane Home Show this weekend. We've got a massive stand there giving away extra free stuff. Then, I've got the billboards, we've got the buses, all because of staff. It's pretty hard for people not to see that we are everywhere.

What happens is, once they're talking about us, saying, "I just got a really good deal from George from MADD Loans. You should go see him."

"Oh, I've seen that guy."

You know, it reinforces that you're dealing with someone who's motivated, pro-active, and passionate about his industry. That's what you want to come across as. Do you know what I mean?

Alex: Absolutely. It seems like, I guess, your personality and your networking abilities are really something which have driven your success at MADD, but also, at your time as a mobile banker. Just for those listening in, we're talking about Vince Sorrenti and your relationship with him. I believe, and correct me if I'm wrong, that began because he was MC at the Better Business summit, and you approached him about his homeland. Is that correct?

George: I didn't even win an award that night. That was my first national awards [Grover 00:12:39] finalist. Luckily, the next year I did win the award there, which is awesome.

Alex: You won a client in Vince, though.

George: I did. I got Vince as a client, out of the room full of mortgage brokers. Vince is the MC and, of course, I know Vince from ... Not know him, but I know of him from watching Celebrity Apprentice, and so on. I said, "Hey, Vince. How are you? It's nice to meet you."

He goes, "Hey, how are you?" He's wearing a bright green jacket.

I said, "Vince ..." I can't remember what I said. I said, "You got a home loan?"

He said, "Of course, I've got a home loan, man."

I said, "What's your [dis 00:13:12] rate?" He said some exorbitant amount. I said, "I bet you I can save you some money there." He gave me his business card. I followed him up the next day. I end up refinancing him and saved him a lot of money. He still is a client today.

Alex: George, that's superb.

George: Yeah.

Alex: That's superb. It really is. I'd imagine that Vince has got a pretty reasonable network, as well.

George: Yeah. He's great, mate. He's doing really good. I've met some really good people because of him.

Alex: Are you broker to the stars, now?

George: Yeah. No, I just keep in regular contact, of course, as he's a client, but also with some cool ideas for some marketing ideas for next year. He's happy, and he's been really good for us, as well, in terms of our brand ambassador.

Alex: That's a great move. George, in terms of your group ... You're with Connective, is that correct

George: I am. The best [inaudible 00:14:02]

Alex: Absolutely. I didn't say that. You can say whatever you want, though, on this show. George, we've got a reasonable insight into how you got started and some of the fundamentals that you've put into your business and some real key stuff around your advertising, and you've touched on technology. Just

tell me a little bit of how you view technology around your business. What you feel like you're doing that might be different to others, or what you're getting from your aggregate that's helping you get ahead.

George: I think in this day and age, with the cost of staff and so on, it's vital to keep your staff lean and have really good systems and procedures so you can write a high volume of lines and clients, but not having to have ten staff. The technology which Connective has in its Mercury Program gives us the ability to do that. Very organized. It's very automated. All of our automated emails and text messages between clients and various milestones and standard updates, and so on.

I believe without that technology, it'd be very difficult to write the [program 00:15:03] I'm writing. That [grove 00:15:06] of technology there, and we use it 100%. A lot of people, I believe, don't use the technology. It's there right in front of them, but they don't educate themselves on how to use it. It's taken me a long time to be fully familiar with the software, and it's continually evolving into a species which is even better for us. I think people really need to spend some time to work out what exactly [inaudible 00:15:29] software ten mates, so I can do for them because it definitely makes life easier. The more less handling on a file you can have, the more time you have to go get more business.

Alex: George, it's been great chatting to you. Look, thanks very much for your time. I know you're a busy man. I really would like to carry on talking to you, but I think what I'd like to do is see if we can get you back to catch up with us, maybe, in a couple of weeks' time. I'd just like to say thanks to James Mitchell, Editor at Large, for contributing. To all those who are listening, look, thanks very much for your time. Look forward to catching up with you soon.