

## **Product investment – it's not important, it's critical**

**Mark Loffhouse, CEO of Mortgage Brain.**

Any company that sells a product or service and wants to survive and thrive needs to constantly come up with new products, new ideas and new ways of thinking to stay ahead of the game.

The technology market – consumer and business to business - is a particularly competitive market and the longevity and survival of many tech companies is down, quite simply, to their approach to product investment and development.

Apple is the world's largest tech company and regularly features in lists of the top ten companies in the world of any description. There's one very good reason for that – it keeps bringing out new products that people want to buy. The first iPhone, the product on which the company is built, was launched ten years ago and since then the business has continued to launch a range of new, innovative iPhones and along the way supported by the launch of new 'connected' products and devices like the iPad and Apple Watch.

If Apple had lost its way and was still trying to sell the original 'ten year old' iPhone, I can pretty much guarantee that, as a company, it'd be rotten to the core by now! Blackberry and Nokia prove that point!

Now, while the mortgage technology market may not run on a global scale like Apple, the principles remain the same. Any company in its sector which doesn't listen to its customers and adapt to a changing market can't possibly survive in the long run.

Let me start close to home for a minute. Mortgage Brain recently celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. And we're still as relevant now as we were 30 years ago. This is because we continually listen to our customers, invest in new products and people, and develop new and associated technology products and services to bring to the market. If we didn't, we wouldn't be here. Simple as that.

Resting on your laurels just isn't an option these days. Technological capabilities move so fast now that you need to be nimble to keep up with it, and crucially, have the resources to be able to make your vision and ideas a reality. It's why we invest over 40% of our expenditure each year into product research and development.

It's through product development and investment in the mortgage technology market that saw the launch of the mortgage industry's first ever sourcing system. The ability to complete and submit AIPs and Full Applications digitally and receive a lending decision in under a minute. The launch in 2012 of the industry's first mobile App that promoted advisers to consumers and brought in new business leads.

It was through investment like this that brought the industry's first ever iPad-based sourcing system to the table as well as the development of multi-device, online and offline, fully integrated first and second charge sourcing solutions. It was through investment and development that helped mortgage advisers break into new markets such as Conveyancing and second charge sourcing.

And let's not forget the digital revolution. Despite all the air time it's been getting recently, it has, in one form or another, been around for years – it just didn't have a label!

*And where did all these developments come from?*

Continuous investment in people, products and services – if done properly - is much more than just bringing new products to the market for the sake of it.

Done properly, product development and investment allows companies to help and support advisers through the constant regulatory and market changes. With so much going on it's easy to take a lot of these developments and enhancements for granted but many of the systems that are available and in use day in day out have helped the industry deal with MDay, the Mortgage Market

Review, the Mortgage Credit Directive, and now with GDPR, which comes into force in May 2018.

Adviser technology is also ahead of the curve for 'digital' - the latest kid on the block - with apps like UKMortgages being the best and most used mortgage search app and a 'yellow pages' for mortgage advisers. Interactive websites with mortgage search and selection capabilities are here and now, together with digital client portals, which enable consumers to complete online Fact Finds, and securely send and receive information and documentation - all of which is way ahead of what the large aggregators have to offer.

So what's next? Looking ahead five or more years the biggest changes will be in the way we interact with computers with voice commands taking over from keyboards, and if we go all out Sci-Fi, there'll be holograms and human like robots! Who knows where it will end?

The mortgage tech industry may not have Apple's global scale, but it's still investing millions in R&D to keep advisers ahead of the game in an ever changing market. Continuous investment, therefore, isn't important, it's critical.