

TRADING ACTIVITY

BARRANTAGH INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT Canadian Small Cap Equities

Overall, it was a good year for equity markets with Canadian stocks rallying for much of the fourth quarter before finishing December on a softer note. Donald Trump's sweeping victory in the U.S. election propelled risk markets as enthusiasm for deregulation and pro-business posturing offset fears around the impact of his more protectionist ambitions. Medium and longer-term interest rates backed up considerably upon the commencement of the Fed loosening in September as bond investors swung back to concerns around stickier levels of inflation and structurally higher rates.

There were some fits and starts for non-resource small caps during the year. As rates moved lower, sentiment towards smaller names that were out of favour got bid. However, this partially reversed towards the end of the year (with rates), leaving 2024 as another more narrow, large cap led market.

Two areas of strength throughout the year for the Portfolio were the financials and information technology sectors. Propel Holdings (PRL) led financials with strong earnings growth and a rerate as volumes and underwriting continue to surprise to the upside. In tech, Softchoice (SFTC) book-ended 2024 with two big shareholder wins: 1) a \$4/share special dividend in Q1 signalling strong confidence in the outsized cash flow generation of the business; and 2) a \$24.50 take-private offer at a premium in Q4, continuing the undervalued M&A theme. The most

significant detractor for the Portfolio for the year was the metals and mining sub-sector (of which gold miners are the most significant component and the Portfolio has no exposure), which led the small cap index and was a relative ~775 bps drag, accounting for more than the total performance delta to the benchmark.

After the successful outcome of the Sleep Country (ZZZ) takeover, another specialty retailer was added to the portfolio: Pet Value (PET). PET is a market leader in the Canadian pet food industry with 18% market share. Similar to the trends impacting ZZZ, there was a boom in activity during the pandemic where people increased spending around the home, including pet ownership. This was followed by a decline from the pandemic heights and a more competitive challenged consumer landscape over the past two years. We are now seeing green shoots of a return to growth and free cash flow inflection (with share buyback recently initiated). We like the potential inflection with this high-quality business trading at a low valuation multiple on low earning expectations and fundamentals set up to improve over the next year.

Heading into 2025, the outlook for Canadian small-cap stocks looks solid. Despite the double-digit positive returns in 2024, valuations look attractive both on an absolute basis (company multiples 12% below 5-year averages) and relative to large cap

stocks (small cap multiples 35% below large caps). As certain pockets of the market contend with lofty valuations, we think breadth is set to improve benefitting areas of the market that are currently being overlooked.

BUYS

Pet Value (PET)

Pet Value is a leading Canadian specialty pet food retailer with ~800 stores and ~18% market share. It is a highly franchised model (~75%), has driven strong historical profitability and returns on capital. It has been weathering a more challenging consumer environment well. It's seeing positive inflection in growth, free cash flow, share buyback initiated. We like the potential inflection with this high-quality business trading at a low valuation multiple on low earning expectations and fundamentals set up to improve over the next year.

SELLS

Premium Brands (PBH)

Continued challenges in the food distribution vertical (restaurants) combined with new challenges in specialty foods (Starbucks slowdown) has reduced earnings growth outlook. Higher debt levels lower optionality on accretive M&A and buybacks. We see more attractive risk-reward in Pet Value.

Minto Apartment (MI-UN)

Softening rental market in Toronto; exposed to immigration reform - negative sentiment on sector.

The name has underperformed peers over the full market cycle.

Tamarack (TVE)

TVE was held through the execution struggles and it has come back remarkably +52% ttm (vs SMID E&P - 2%; HWX +9%). The multiple has rerated to 3.1x (from ~2x lows) and trades in line with 5YA of 3.2x. We prefer the management team and pure-play Clearwater region, Headwater Exploration, that is debt free.

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