

INVESTMENT FOCUS

Personal Newsletter from Stone Wealth Management

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For 2020: Skip Prediction Season

The start of a new year comes with a host of market predictions. But this year, why not consider skipping prediction season?

Perhaps one of the more striking reminders of the dangers of predictions occurred 40 years ago when Businessweek Magazine declared the "Death of Equities". It warned the "death of equities as a near-permanent condition." While inflation was rampant and markets did perform poorly during this time, as Bloomberg recently noted in embarrassment, "the total return on the S&P 500 stock index since its 1982 low, with dividends reinvested, has been nearly 7,000 percent. Not bad for a corpse."¹

These dramatic predictions haven't subsided over time, likely because the media thrives on this type of excitement. In 2016, the Royal Bank of Scotland warned of a "cataclysmic" year, advising investors to "sell everything except high quality bonds."² Investors who did so would have missed out on a gain of 27.6 percent since that time.³

While we shouldn't ignore the work of analysts, economists or researchers, we should be careful not to make longer-term decisions based on any short-term worry created by the media. Nobody can predict the course of near-term markets, except to say that fluctuations in both directions should always be expected.

What is the outlook for 2020? 2019 was a year of ongoing geopolitical concerns, slowing economies, global trade tensions, and another hard run for the resources sector at home. And yet, equity markets in Canada and the U.S. held their own quite well. The year ahead brings similar uncertainty. However, should the U.S. and China make progress towards reaching a partial trade deal, it could help to temper some trade tension uncertainty and support growth. We are also in a U.S. presidential election year, historically a time in which U.S. equity markets have performed well.

Regardless, portfolios should be positioned for the longer term, with the expectation that markets will experience ups and downs. Many techniques are used to manage risk, including maintaining diversification, rebalancing to a certain asset mix, and upholding quality criteria, among others. For each investor, these will depend on factors such as investment objectives, needs, stage of life and risk tolerance. These considerations will help to weather the inevitable storms.

So consider skipping prediction season and maintain a longer-term view. May the turn of the decade bring health, happiness and prosperity to you and your loved ones.

1. bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-13/it-s-been-40-years-since-our-cover-story-declared-the-death-of-equities; 2. theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/12/sell-everything-ahead-of-stock-market-crash-say-rbs-economists; 3. Based on FTSE 100 at 1/3/16 & 9/1/19.

In This Issue

RRSP Season Reminders ...2
The Benefits of Dividends ...2

Are You Keeping Good Digital Hygiene? ...3
How Often Do You Check Investments? ...4

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Have You Contributed?

RRSP Season Again: The \$1 Trillion Opportunity

Over \$1 trillion: At last count, that's how much that was reported by Statistics Canada as the total amount of unused Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) contribution room of Canadian taxpayers.¹ While unused contribution room may be carried forward indefinitely — and there may be good reasons to do so — there is a forgone opportunity of tax-deferred, compounded growth.

RRSP contributions appear to be declining over recent years, perhaps due to certain perceptions. One belief is that it is better to invest funds in a Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) because TFSA funds are not taxed at withdrawal. However, consider that the RRSP may be a better choice than a TFSA if you expect to have a lower marginal tax rate in retirement (see chart). This may apply to individuals who experience peak earning years while working but will have a lower income in later in life.

Don't forgo the tax advantages offered by an RRSP. Does any of that \$1 trillion belong to you?

1. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110004501>



RRSP vs. TFSA With Lower Future Marginal Tax Rate

| | RRSP | TFSA |
|----------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Pre-Tax Income | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Tax @ 33.33% | n/a | (\$1,000) |
| Total Invested (After Tax) | \$3,000 | \$2,000 |
| Growth @ 5% | \$150 | \$100 |
| Total Pre-Tax | \$3,150 | \$2,100 |
| Tax @ 20% | (\$630) | n/a |
| Net After-Tax Proceeds | \$2,520 | \$2,100 |

Reminder: Deadline for RRSP contributions for the 2019 tax year is **Monday March 2, 2020.**

Don't Overlook the Benefits of Dividends

In the excitement of the rising markets of a bull run, dividends can often take a back seat to capital gains in terms of investor focus. But don't overlook the value of quality, dividend-paying securities or funds in supporting our investing programs.

An article recently published in The Globe & Mail highlighted a little known benefit of the dividend tax credit: the opportunity to earn up to \$52,000 in tax-free income from eligible Canadian dividends in certain provinces. With no other sources of income, the dividend tax credit and the basic personal amount have the potential to reduce the taxes on eligible dividends to zero (see chart below).¹

Eligible Dividend Amount That Can Be Received Tax Free 2019²

| Province | Tax-Free Amount | Province | Tax-Free Amount |
|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
| BC | \$52,070 | QC | \$39,503 |
| AB | \$52,070 | NB | \$52,070 |
| SK | \$52,070 | NS | \$32,408 |
| MB | \$25,588 | PE | \$47,134 |
| ON | \$52,070 | NL | \$18,495 |

While neat in concept, most of us have employment or pension income that would get in the way. It would also be rare for many investors to have a portfolio that would generate \$52,000 of eligible dividend income. At 4 percent dividend income, it would require more than \$1 million in non-registered, dividend-paying securities.

But the article is a good reminder of one of the benefits of dividends. In an age when many of us feel as though we

Growth of \$10,000 Invested in S&P/TSX Composite: 30 Years³



are being substantially taxed, dividends can be a tax-efficient means of investing. Eligible dividends receive more favourable tax treatment in a non-registered account, compared to interest and regular income, since this type of income benefits from the federal (and provincial) dividend tax credit.

It is also worthwhile to remember that dividends can play a significant role in generating longer-term returns for investors. This is evident when comparing the S&P/TSX Composite index returns to total returns including reinvested dividends over the past 30 years (graph above). Dividend income can also help deliver consistent cash flow to investors, especially important for many retirees, as finding income has become more difficult in a low-interest rate environment. And many quality corporations continue to increase their dividends to investors over time.

As such, don't dismiss the power of quality, dividend-paying securities in supporting our investing programs.

1. "How to earn \$52,000 tax free", Globe & Mail, 8/9/19; 2. As of August 9, 2019, Source: taxtips.ca/dtc/enhanceddtdt/amt.htm; 3. S&P/TSX Composite 10/89 to 10/19.

Your Online Accounts

Are You Keeping Good Digital Hygiene?

As technology advances, online crimes continue to improve in sophistication and our digital security is increasingly being challenged. If our choice of passwords is any indication, we may not be doing our best to stay secure. One example? According to a recent report, 23.2 million people who had their online accounts hacked were still using the password "123456."¹

Are there ways to improve our digital hygiene? Here are some basic tips. While many may seem obvious, this list can provide useful talking points for discussions with potentially higher-risk individuals, such as young adults or seniors.

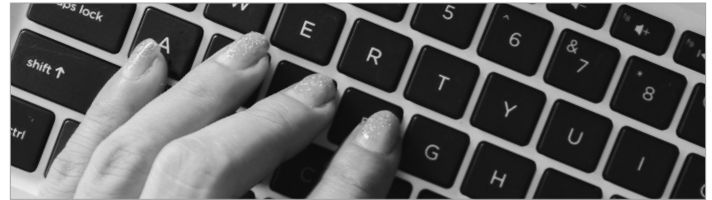
Keep strong passwords — Strengthen your passwords. Avoid reusing the same userID/password across multiple sites. With the average person reportedly having over 90 online accounts,² this may be a challenge. Using a password manager can help to generate, store, encrypt and auto-fill passwords, and you'll just need to remember one password.

Separate critical information — Consider isolating devices for different activities. For example, online gaming may be more susceptible to security breaches, so it may be wise to avoid storing confidential information on devices used for this activity.

Protect devices in public — Unsecure Wi-Fi hotspots, such as those offered at airports or in taxicabs, or public USB charging stations, are often targets for hackers. Consider using a Virtual Private Network for protection, which allows you to bypass location tracking and adds a layer of obfuscation to your traffic.

Avoid linking accounts — Some third-party websites allow you to link other accounts, such as email or social media. However, linking multiple accounts can increase the potential damage that occurs if one account becomes compromised.

Don't share personal information — Remember that each time you click a website link or answer a seemingly innocuous



How Long Does It Take to Crack a Password?

Here is one estimate of how fast a hacker could crack password configurations. (Note: processing speeds continue to increase.)

- **<0.01 seconds** — Easy passwords (e.g., 123456, qwerty, password, sunshine)¹
- **25 seconds** — 5-digit passwords²
- **11 hours** — 6-digit passwords³
- **46 days** — 8-digit password³
- **12 years** — 10-digit passwords³

Sources: 1. spycloud.com/how-long-would-it-take-to-crack-your-password/; 2. Consumer Protection BC; 3. nypost.com/2018/04/19/it-takes-next-to-no-time-to-crack-an-iphones-passcode/ awareness/password-best-practices.

survey, your data is collected. Information broadcast on websites or social media may be accessible to unscrupulous individuals, even if privacy settings are enabled. Consider disguising personal data (i.e., posting an altered name/birthdate) to protect your identity.

Verify a source to prevent phishing — Criminals continue to improve the sophistication with which they masquerade as others. There may be subtle indications that a source is fake: an email/text doesn't address you directly ("dear customer") or contains spelling or grammatical errors. Remember that reputable institutions will never ask to verify account information or sensitive personal data online. Take time to verify a source. When in doubt, call an organization directly using the phone number posted on a general website.

1. bbc.com/news/technology-47974583; 2. digitalguardian.com/blog/uncovering-password-habits-are-users-password-security-habits-improving-infographic

Resolutions for a New Year: Keep Time on Your Side

"You may delay, but time will not." — Benjamin Franklin

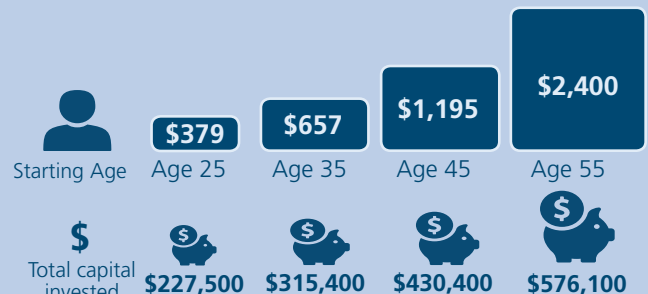
It has been said that procrastination is the thief of time. As we begin another year, don't let procrastination preclude you from using time wisely to generate wealth.

Perhaps there is an opportunity to put funds to work that are currently sitting on the sidelines. Or how about passing along some financial wisdom to younger generations, teaching them the value of time and compounded growth?

The chart to the right shows the impact that time can have on generating retirement savings. By starting earlier, an investor would need less capital in order to accumulate a \$1 million nest egg by the age of 75 (based on the assumptions).

Remember that time can be one of an investor's greatest allies.

Estimated Monthly Amount Needed to Accumulate \$1M by Age 75 at 5 Percent Compounded Annual Return



Note: Assumes 5% rate of return compounded annually, taxes & expenses ignored. Estimate monthly amount equals the annual investment amount divided by 12. For illustrative purposes only.

How Often Are You Checking Investment Performance?

Technology continues to change the speed at which we process information. According to Netflix, it takes just 1.8 seconds for subscribers to consider each program title they encounter.¹ Studies show that online shoppers are more likely to make a purchase if they can retrieve product information more quickly. It was reported that for every 100 millisecond improvement in load time, Walmart experienced up to a one percent increase in online revenue.²

At the same time, we've conditioned ourselves to seek information more rapidly. In investing, we can quickly access our portfolios online to check performance. This often doesn't take much longer than selecting a show on Netflix.

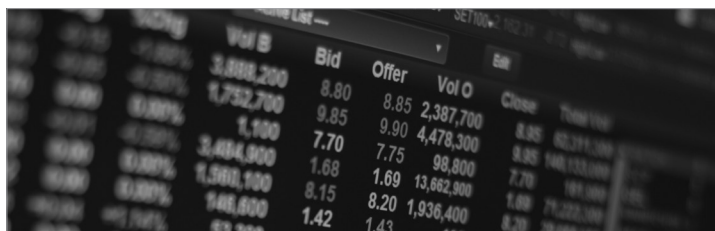
However, frequent checking of investment performance may not provide the right feedback. The problem? The information we receive about short-term performance isn't usually indicative of what will happen over the longer term. Checking market performance more frequently increases the likelihood of seeing downward movements.

S&P/TSX Composite Returns: Oct. '84 to '19

| Time Frame | Positive | Negative |
|---------------------|----------|----------|
| Daily | 54% | 46% |
| Quarterly | 64% | 36% |
| One Year (Annually) | 71% | 29% |
| Every 5 Years | 91% | 9% |
| Every 10 Years | 100% | 0% |

Source: S&P/TSX Composite Index Returns 10/01/84 to 10/29/19.

Two investors with the same investment performance could have different perspectives based on the frequency with which information is accessed. Checking the S&P/TSX Composite Index on a daily basis, instead of quarterly, would increase the odds of seeing a negative result by 10 percentage points (see chart). While some of us may have



the mental fortitude to prevent negative performance from affecting our mood, the reality is that many of us do not.

When focusing on short-term performance, it is also easy to overlook the realities of longer-term investing:

1. Volatility is a normal part of equity markets. Since 1970, over 60 percent of annual S&P/TSX Composite Index total returns have been either greater than 20 percent or negative. Yet the market returned an average of around 6 percent annually over this period. Simply put, there is a high likelihood of large movements in market returns, but this volatility smooths out over time.

2. Different investments, asset classes, or even investment accounts (based on asset location) may perform differently over time. A well-structured portfolio uses techniques such as asset allocation and diversification to help minimize risk by investing across areas that react differently to changes in the markets.

3. Markets and economies are cyclical by nature. Long-term investors will experience both up and down markets; a solid wealth plan builds in this expectation over time.

While it is easy to access investment performance details, checking performance less frequently may better align with the overall investment process. After all, the objective is likely not to liquidate your investments today or tomorrow, but instead to maximize your returns over the longer run.

1. forbes.com/sites/jiawertz/2017/03/17/how-to-compete-for-consumers-online-while-attention-spans-diminish/#1a4f97366679; 2. fastcompany.com/90309682/heres-what-happened-when-i-watched-everything-netflix-told-me-to-for-2-weeks

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