

January 5, 2015

US Equity Strategy

The 2015 Playbook

We begin 2015, our fifth year of managing the US equity strategy product at Morgan Stanley, with mixed emotions. Last year, 2014, was our first year ever as equity strategists where our portfolio didn't beat the S&P500, lagging by 250bps. While our sector overweights in healthcare and technology were generally helpful, and our underweight in consumer discretionary for the first half of the year was spot on, the large growth rotation in the spring of 2014, our energy market-weight (not underweight) in the last third of the year, and poor application of the quantamental approach (read: stock selection) were the culprits.

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What stocks most influenced S&P500 performance in 2014? Amazon, IBM, CVX, XOM, and GE were the biggest negative contributors to S&P500 performance (market-cap weighted) in 2014. We generally avoided this group, holding only GE in a 1% position and getting a reasonable entry point in February, and owning none of the other names during the year. In summary, we did a reasonable job avoiding the underperformers. On the flip side, the biggest positive contributors were Apple (where we held a 4% position through the year until early December when we reduced it to 3%), MSFT, Berkshire, FB, and Intel. We basically didn't own four of the top five positive contributors, and generally, we didn't own the right technology stocks (ORCL was another top ten contributor to 2014 S&P500 performance we didn't own, with much of that in December). Without a doubt technology stock selection has been the poorest attribute of our portfolio since our initiation in 2011. It should not be surprising that we were technology analysts earlier in our career, as biases galore caused us at various times to poorly implement, i.e. stray, from the quantamental discipline, particularly in the technology sector. Our New Year's resolution in 2015 is to stop saying things like, "People don't understand Micron," when quite obviously we are the ones who don't understand it. We "owned up" to this in a note in the Fall of 2014, and our subsequent 2014 performance has been better, as we have been adhering more militantly to the quantamental rule book, adding or raising weights to stocks that screen well in our quantitative models and are Overweight rated by our analysts, and removing or reducing stocks they are no longer recommending as Overweight and that screen poorly in disciplined strategies.

The good news is that our quantamental approach has been generally positive, as our cumulative performance since the portfolio's launch at Morgan Stanley on January 1st of 2011 is now 960 basis points ahead of the market. With some perspective, our outperformance of about 250 bps a year for the last four years, even including last year's underperformance, is about what we should expect to be over the long term with our low turnover, large cap, quantamental, portfolio discipline. Given that our portfolio's beta has generally been below 1 for much of the last four years, this performance, volatility adjusted, has been in the top quintile of long only US equity investors.

Despite 2014's portfolio-level underperformance, we had a good market call last year. Our year-end target of 2014 on the S&P500, set in early December of 2013, and at the time the highest on the street, was not only easy to remember, but proved to be only 2% off the year end mark of 2058.9. Part of the challenge for investors (and us) has been that the types of stocks that have worked in the up tape haven't been typical of good markets. Utilities, REITS and other yield-related securities have continued to do well, and cyclicals like machinery and metals and mining were awful. It is the microstructure that matters and "under the surface" volatility has been far greater than "market level" volatility in the last several quarters.

The 2015 Outlook

We begin 2015 with a continued positive market outlook, having established a year-end 2015 target of 2275 in last month's year-ahead outlook. Our base case is 7% earnings growth, further supported by more than a 2% net buyback and an additional 2% dividend yield. If investors want to be short the S&P500, what they are really betting on is that earnings will decline, given the 4% total yield (dividend plus repurchase) seems pretty safe at this point. What would cause such an EPS decline? Our general sense is that the US economy is improving. Morgan Stanley's economic forecast is that the global GDP will be modestly higher in 2015, as US growth is stronger, Japan expands, Europe stabilizes, and the hot spots in the EM aren't large enough to drag down the global outlook. The two biggest global economies are China and the US. Hence, those areas represent the biggest risks to the current outlook. If the US economy slows materially, or if we get a few bad jobs reports or ISMs, this could cause a double digit S&P500 pullback. But our house forecast is for an improving US economy, so positioning for the decline doesn't seem prudent. China is also clearly difficult to forecast, but we are betting on some stabilization and higher GDP growth in China than we get in the rest of the world.

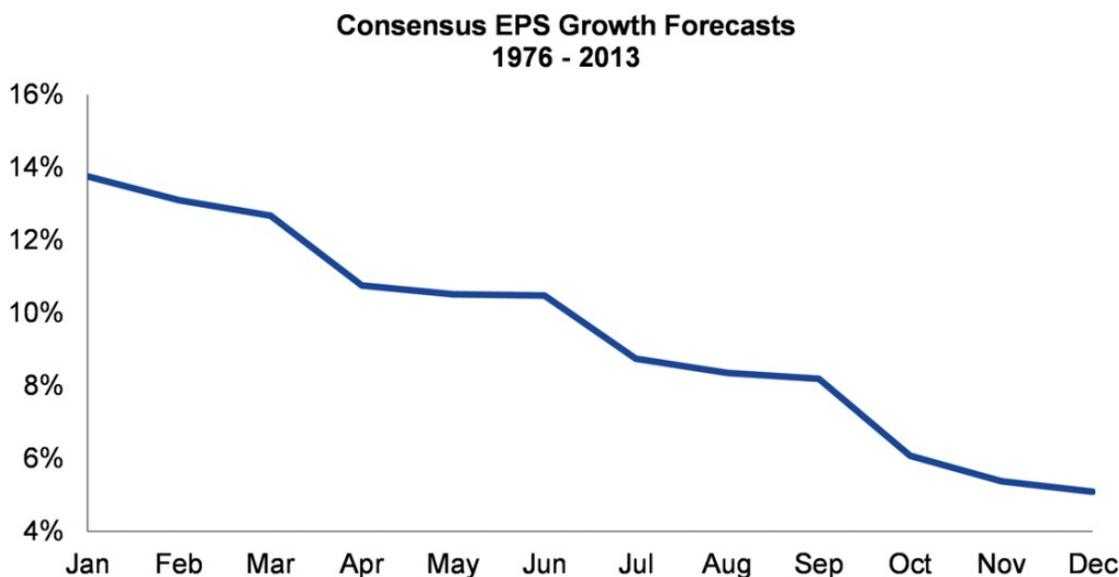
The part of our forecast that is clearly the most dubious is our forecast that the market multiple will expand to 16.9x in 2015. We don't think anyone (including us) can provide empirical evidence with statistical significance to forecast the price-to-earnings ratio of the S&P500 in a 12-month or shorter time frame. In fact, probably not in time frames shorter than a few years. Yes, we are strategists and

no we don't think we can forecast the market level. We don't think anyone can, and we wish more people knew that. While we are not surprised when people ask us our views about the market level, since some people regard that as part of our job, we have consistently demonstrated that we – and others – can't forecast the multiple. We should point out the preponderance of these questions come from financial advisors and the press, as opposed to institutional portfolio managers.

As we mentioned, our best guess, which, again, we can't support with data, is that the multiple will modestly expand. Why? We are tracking a whole host of economics, corporate, and credit factors, and think that they need to markedly shift in order for fear to increase about the potential for an earnings decline. **These factors include economic variables like consumer obligations, confidence, and delinquencies, corporate hubris gauges like capital spending, inventory, hiring, and M&A, and credit cycle issues like spreads, interest coverage, terms, and cost of capital.**

Over the past 39 years, the bottom-up earnings estimates for the US market have been too high 32 times, meaning that the analysts are typically too optimistic. In fact, analysts' estimates typically gross up to a 14% expectation for growth in a given January, only to decline through the year to 6% on average by year end ([Exhibit 1](#)). Therefore, it can't be that what matters is downward earnings revisions at the market level.

Exhibit 1: Forward Earnings Expectations Tend to Decline Throughout Any Given Year



Source: Thomson Reuters, Morgan Stanley Research

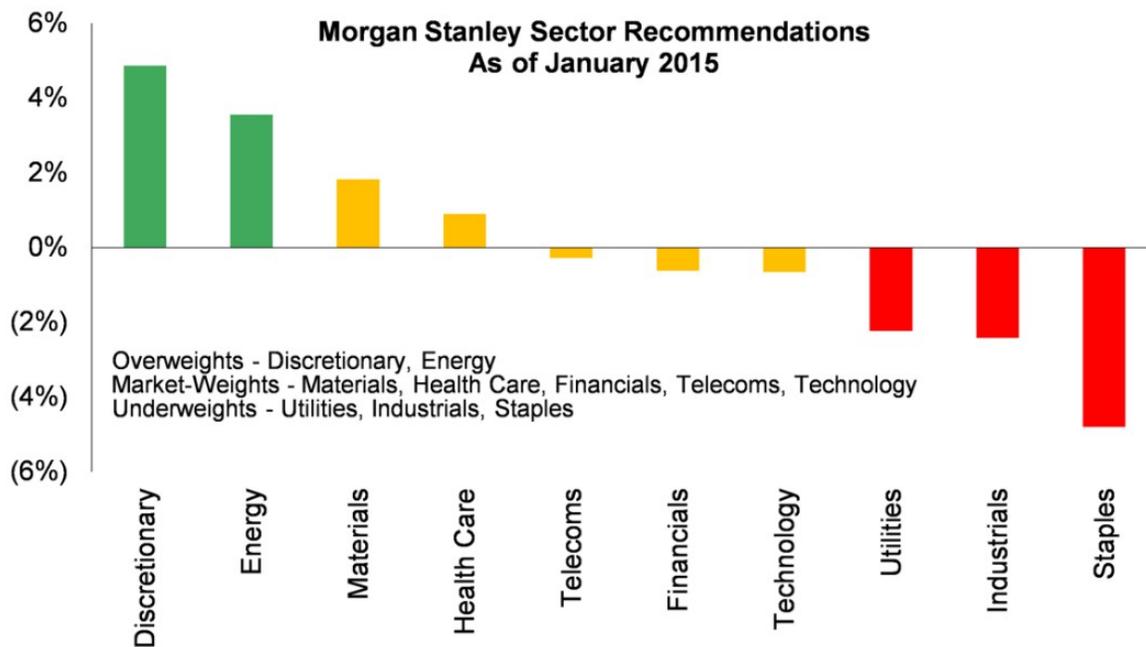
Our best guess is that what matters is the probability investors assign to an earnings decline, or to the bear case for earnings forming. As long as that stays above a certain threshold, the market seems to work. Since no one has this real-time probability distribution, the short-term multiple forecast is impossible. We absolutely believe over the long-term, say between five and ten years, that the market multiple is influenced by growth and rates, and given the current levels, we have reasonable conviction that the multiple will be lower several years from now. But in the interim, we are hoping we are not too arrogant by guessing that as long as our laundry list of factors doesn't markedly change, this could be a long economic expansion and the multiple could trend higher. That's our best guess, for now.

Sector and Portfolio Level Thoughts - Consensus and Contrarian Alike

We are recommending that investors overweight consumer discretionary and energy stocks, underweight industrials, consumer staples, and utilities ([Exhibit 2](#)). Our sense is that the contrarian bets at present are to be

overweight energy and underweight industrials, with the more consensual bets being to avoid the high yielding but expensive utilities and staples, and to own discretionary driven by the lower gas price.

Exhibit 2: We Are Overweight Discretionary and Energy



Source: Thomson Reuters, Morgan Stanley Research

Consumer discretionary: Our sense is that our overweight here is more of a tactical bet. We like the fact that the low end consumer benefits from lower fuel at the pump, but stocks like WMT and many other low end consumer stocks have been quickly re-rated higher, so our bets now are more on brands. We have substantive positions in NKE, LB, and HOG but all of them have moved materially post our additions, and our conviction level is more muted today. We have continued bets in media with FOXA and CBS, and still believe auto SAAR will be high enough to keep some exposure to auto parts names like DLPH.

Energy: Our bet here feels quite contrarian. During a recent visit with a long-only portfolio manager, he said “energy is over for a year because of all the capacity that has already been added.” Our recent upgrade to overweight, something we addressed in two follow up notes in December, is predicated on three thoughts. Firstly, we think that the stocks are cyclical, and every time they have been down this much they have subsequently outperformed the S&P500 six months later. Secondly, the stocks typically bottom before the earnings revisions bottom, on average by two months, and as numbers have been slashed and likely will be further cut during the coming earnings season, we know we have to be anticipatory. Thirdly, the valuation for services and exploration and production companies is in the bottom decile on price-to-book and EV-to-EBITDA, levels heretofore only seen in recessions. We worry we are early, but the stocks have held in reasonably well over the last month, and we think further capacity reductions could make investors anticipatory of a higher oil price in the out years, providing some reasonable floor and good risk-reward for the stocks.

Healthcare and Technology – Contrarian to be market-weight? While we are currently market-weight both, a lot of investors we spoke with recently are overweight at least one (or both of these groups). For healthcare, our assessment is that our call there was probably our best sector-level call in the last four years. We were overweight 2011-through December 1st of 2014, nearly four years, on a thesis that there would be a R&D pipeline re-rating in biotechnology and pharmaceuticals and that the medical distribution businesses would benefit from volumes and were growth at a reasonable price. Both played out, and our view is reducing the overweight in now prudent. We still hold a 4% position in MCK, and a 2% one in CAH, and select pharma and biotech, and we don’t view healthcare as a short, but valuations are now at ten-year highs on price-to-forward earnings in absolute terms, even if they remain compelling against other defensives like consumer staples.

For technology, we struggle to implement a discipline where we want to own stocks that are recommended by our fundamental analysts and screen well in our disciplined strategies. Today, there is one technology stock, HPQ, that screens in the top quintile in both our 24-month model, BEST, and our 3-month alpha model, MOST, that is recommended by a fundamental analyst at Morgan Stanley. Hard to get 20% weight in technology!

Utilities: While we appreciate that this sector is very idiosyncratic, and we wouldn't be surprised if the 10-year yield went lower in the next few months (we have not studied this like the US equity market multiple but wouldn't be at all surprised if this was also un-forecastable in short horizons), we just can't recommend a sector that is the most expensive vs. its own history it has ever been and trades at a premium to the overall market. Given the S&P500 benchmark weight is only 3%, we don't think the bet is that significant either way, but mid-cap value investors have to make up their minds to avoid valuation if they want to own even the benchmark weight in this group.

Consumer staples: We don't want to turn into staples perma-bears, and every time we scan our own personal items at CVS (where you have to now temporarily work to buy your items), we are surprised at the price inflation. But in aggregate, the group just doesn't look compelling. Valuations are high, estimate achievability is below average, and the stronger dollar impacts the household and personal products industry more than any other. Our sense is that if the market pulls back, this group will be resilient, and in some ways it looks more compelling than yield-focused names in REITS, and utilities, but our analysts disfavor a lot of the market cap, making it difficult to use our discipline here.

Industrials: While the energy stocks are down and the consumer stocks are up on lower oil, we don't think we have seen the full commensurate response yet from the industrials, particularly those that benefit from energy related capital spending. We still like rails and airlines (UNP and DAL are in the portfolio) but many of the high quality names look pricey, and the low quality names are currently exhibiting particularly poor fundamentals but aren't down anywhere near as much as the energy or metals and mining stocks.

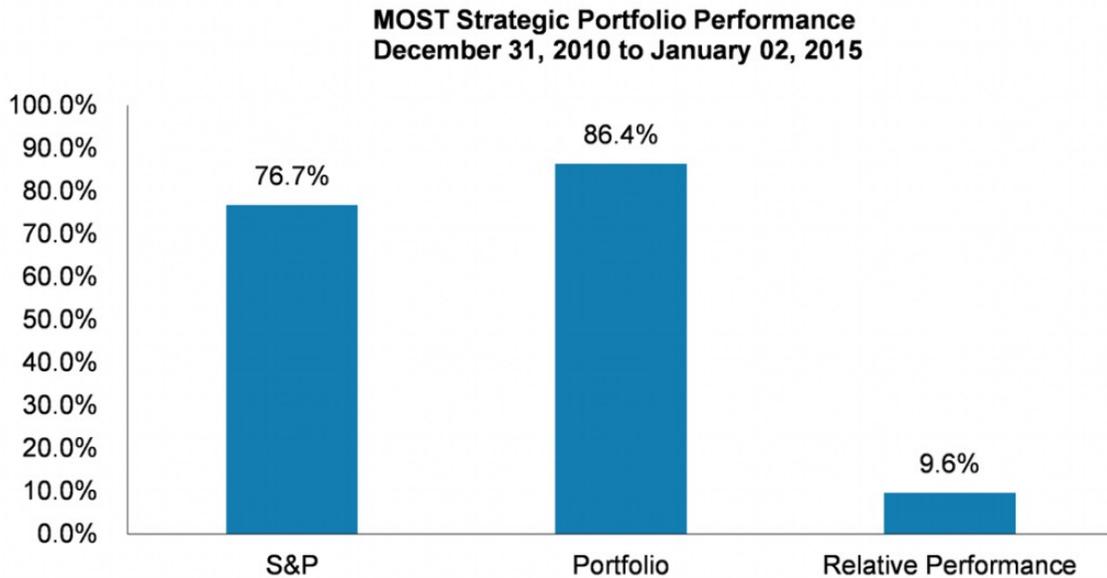
Small Caps: We are also recommending small cap stocks into 2015. We put this trade on aggressively in the middle of 2014 and it didn't work. The logic is that they have more margin expansion potential, better estimate achievability given they are more insulated from the strong dollar and lower oil, and they benefit as M&A picks up. Given they have lagged, we wouldn't be surprised to see better relative performance in the first half of the year.

Crazy thought? Dispersion remains low, and there is a huge focus on monetary policy. We wanted to write an outlook note without mentioning the word "Fed," but we couldn't. Morgan Stanley's House Call is that the Fed will act in 2016, as they will have to mark down their forecast for growth and want to be confident the US economy is on solid footing before acting. Virtually everyone we talk to thinks the market sells off when the Fed acts. Our crazy thought is that the market goes higher, maybe much higher, when the Fed finally acts, as it will be coincident with the accelerating revenue growth everyone wants if, in fact, it does happen. History is also on our side, as typically the market rallied through the first Fed action with EPS growth strong enough to offset multiple contraction. We wouldn't be surprised if the Fed waited longer than the consensus view, and we wouldn't be surprised if the market rallied when the Fed did act.

Portfolio

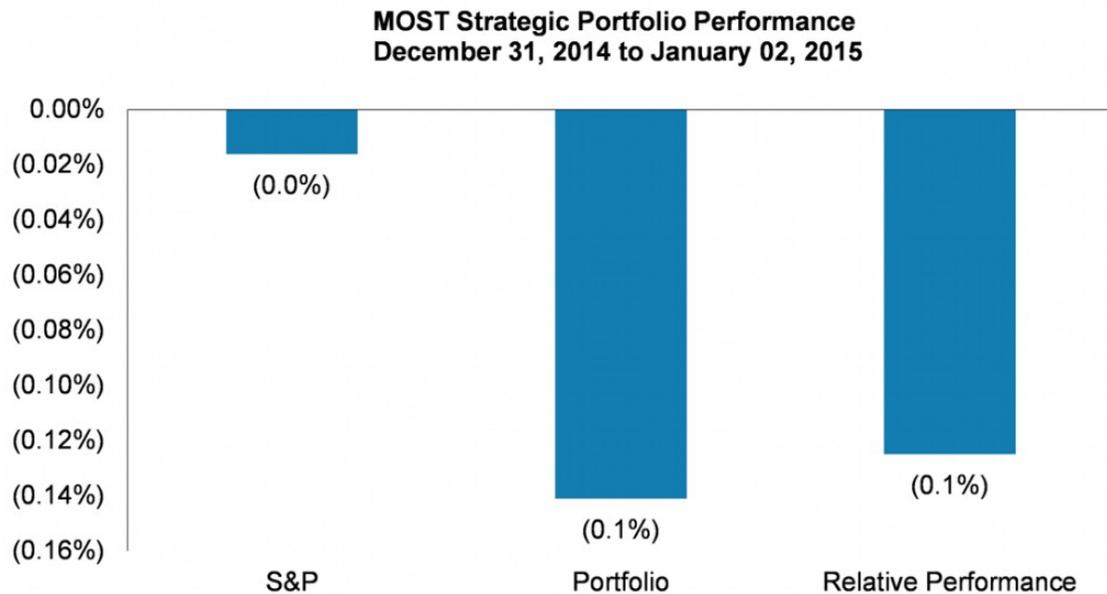
The relative performance of our portfolio to the S&P 500 since inception is 9.6% ([Exhibit 3](#)).

Exhibit 3: Our Portfolio Has Outperformed the S&P 500 (Total Return) by 9.6% Since Inception at the Beginning of 2011



Source: Morgan Stanley Research. Past performance is no guarantee of future returns. Performance includes dividends but excludes transaction costs. Year-to-date, our portfolio has underperformed its benchmark by 12bps ([Exhibit 4](#)).

Exhibit 4: Our Portfolio Has Underperformed the Market by 12bps YTD



Source: Morgan Stanley Research. Past performance is no guarantee of future returns. Performance includes dividends but excludes transaction costs. For reference, the "MOST Strategic Portfolio" is published each week and we generally only make changes on Friday nights and publish the changes early Monday mornings. Followers can therefore roughly mirror the performance. Please recall we use a combination of fundamentals and quantitative assessments to form this portfolio, in a strategy we call "quantamental". We typically start with Overweight-rated stocks by our analysts

that also screen well in our quantitative alpha models. We typically remove stocks that are no longer ranked highly by our quantitative models or have been subsequently downgraded by our fundamental analysts, although we try to do this at a moderate pace in order to keep portfolio turnover low.

The portfolio performance attribution detailing sector and stock contribution to the performance is shown in (Exhibit 5). Stock selection in health care, materials, staples, discretionary, and utilities has been strong, while stock selection in financials and technology has been poor.

Exhibit 5: Our Sector Bet in Health Care Has Helped Drive Outperformance

MOST Strategic Portfolio Performance Attribution December 31, 2010 to January 02, 2015										
Sector	Portfolio				S&P 500			Sector Allocation	Stock Selection	Total
	Relative Weight	Sector Weight	Sector Return	Relative Return	Sector Weight	Sector Return	Relative Return			
Overweight	8.6%	29.0%	86.2%	13.3%	20.4%	72.9%	(3.9%)	0.1%	0.6%	0.7%
Consumer Discretionary	5.1%	17.0%	137.3%	32.5%	11.9%	104.7%	28.0%	(0.6%)	2.5%	1.9%
Energy	3.5%	12.0%	13.9%	(14.1%)	8.5%	28.1%	(48.7%)	0.6%	(1.9%)	(1.2%)
Market-Weights	0.8%	57.0%	89.5%	4.3%	56.2%	85.1%	8.4%	2.4%	(2.1%)	0.4%
Materials	1.8%	5.0%	166.9%	127.6%	3.2%	39.3%	(37.4%)	0.3%	4.1%	4.4%
Health Care	0.7%	15.0%	166.0%	35.8%	14.3%	130.2%	53.5%	2.3%	4.2%	6.5%
Financials	(0.7%)	16.0%	52.6%	(14.9%)	16.7%	67.5%	(9.2%)	(0.4%)	(2.3%)	(2.7%)
Telecommunication Services	(0.3%)	2.0%	1.9%	(35.2%)	2.3%	37.1%	(39.6%)	(0.0%)	(0.6%)	(0.7%)
Information Technology	(0.8%)	19.0%	48.8%	(31.6%)	19.8%	80.4%	3.7%	0.3%	(7.4%)	(7.1%)
Underweights	(9.4%)	14.0%	104.4%	27.0%	23.4%	77.4%	0.6%	1.9%	6.7%	8.6%
Utilities	(2.4%)	1.0%	127.7%	53.2%	3.4%	74.5%	(2.3%)	0.7%	2.2%	2.9%
Industrials	(2.5%)	8.0%	71.2%	(6.4%)	10.5%	77.6%	0.8%	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%
Consumer Staples	(4.5%)	5.0%	152.9%	74.7%	9.5%	78.2%	1.5%	0.5%	4.6%	5.0%
Total	(0.0%)	100.0%	86.4%		100.0%	76.7%		4.4%	5.3%	9.6%

Source: Morgan Stanley Research

The full portfolio is shown below in (Exhibit 6). For those interested in our quantitative output, please go to www.morganstanley.com/equitystrategy and use the alpha screener product for output from our 3-month model (MOST) and our 24-month model (BEST). A video tutorial is available there, or we or your Morgan Stanley salesperson can give you a brief demonstration.

Exhibit 6: The MOST Strategic Portfolio With Fundamental Analyst Recommendations and MOST Alpha Rankings

	Ticker	Company	Weight		Price		Inclusion Date	MOST Quintile	MS Analyst Rating
			S&P 500	Portfolio	Latest	Inclusion			
Consumer Discretionary			12.1%	17.0%					
Hotels, Restaurants and Leisure	PNRA	Panera Bread Company		1.0%	173.10	155.44	9/5/2014	Q1	Equal-Weight
Media	CBS	CBS Corporation		1.0%	54.79	19.05	12/31/2010	Q2	Overweight
Auto Components	DLPH	Delphi Automotive PLC		2.0%	72.59	69.06	5/30/2014	Q1	Overweight
Hotels, Restaurants and Leisure	HOT	Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc.		1.0%	80.68	79.00	11/28/2014	Q3	Overweight
Hotels, Restaurants and Leisure	LVS	Las Vegas Sands Corp.		2.0%	56.30	68.13	8/8/2014	Q2	Overweight
Textiles, Apparel and Luxury Goods	NKE	Nike, Inc.		2.0%	95.03	77.06	8/8/2014	Q2	Overweight
Multiline Retail	M	Macy's, Inc.		1.0%	65.69	59.60	10/3/2014	Q3	Overweight
Automobiles	HOG	Harley-Davidson, Inc.		2.0%	65.79	56.49	10/13/2014	Q3	Overweight
Media	FOXA	Twenty-First Century Fox, Inc.		3.0%	37.85	30.36	3/15/2013	Q3	Overweight
Specialty Retail	LB	L Brands, Inc.		2.0%	86.05	50.49	4/26/2013	Q2	Overweight
Consumer Staples			9.8%	5.0%					
Food Products	WWAV	The WhiteWave Foods Company		2.0%	34.76	21.27	11/29/2013	Q1	Overweight
Food and Staples Retailing	WMT	Wal-Mart Stores Inc.		1.0%	85.90	75.75	7/3/2014	Q5	Overweight
Food and Staples Retailing	SFM	Sprouts Farmers Market, Inc.		2.0%	34.02	31.79	11/28/2014	Q1	Overweight
Energy			8.4%	12.0%					
Oil, Gas and Consumable Fuels	APC	Anadarko Petroleum Corporation		2.0%	82.29	96.48	4/11/2014	Q5	Overweight
Energy Equipment and Services	SLB	Schlumberger Limited		3.0%	85.67	108.38	8/8/2014	Q3	Overweight
Oil, Gas and Consumable Fuels	ETE	Energy Transfer Equity, L.P.		2.0%	58.56	58.26	7/3/2014	NA	Overweight
Energy Equipment and Services	NBR	Nabors Industries Ltd.		2.0%	12.49	17.74	10/17/2014	Q1	++
Oil, Gas and Consumable Fuels	OXY	Occidental Petroleum Corporation		1.0%	80.65	79.77	11/28/2014	Q1	Overweight
Oil, Gas and Consumable Fuels	VLO	Valero Energy Corporation		2.0%	50.34	55.93	5/9/2014	Q1	Overweight
Financials			16.6%	16.0%					
Capital Markets	KKR	KKR & Co. L.P.		2.0%	23.49	23.98	2/21/2014	NA	Overweight
Banks	FITB	Fifth Third Bancorp		1.0%	20.21	21.63	7/3/2014	Q3	Overweight
Insurance	MMC	Marsh & McLennan Companies, Inc.		2.0%	56.97	47.96	2/21/2014	Q5	Overweight
Banks	BAC	Bank of America Corporation		3.0%	17.90	15.82	11/29/2013	Q4	Overweight
Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)	CCI	Crown Castle International Corp.		3.0%	79.51	67.55	11/23/2012	Q5	Overweight
Consumer Finance	AXP	American Express Company		2.0%	93.02	92.42	11/28/2014	Q4	Overweight
Banks	JPM	JPMorgan Chase & Co.		3.0%	62.49	42.42	12/31/2010	Q5	Overweight
Health Care			14.1%	15.0%					
Healthcare Providers and Services	MCK	McKesson Corporation		4.0%	207.20	77.74	2/4/2011	Q5	Overweight
Healthcare Providers and Services	CAH	Cardinal Health, Inc.		2.0%	80.51	38.31	12/31/2010	Q5	Overweight
Biotechnology	BIIB	Biogen Idec Inc.		3.0%	342.01	330.48	9/5/2014	Q2	Overweight
Pharmaceuticals	ABBV	AbbVie Inc.		4.0%	65.89	52.26	5/9/2014	Q5	Equal-Weight
Pharmaceuticals	PFE	Pfizer Inc.		2.0%	31.33	18.15	9/16/2011	Q5	Equal-Weight
Industrials			10.4%	8.0%					
Aerospace and Defense	HON	Honeywell International Inc.		2.0%	100.23	61.72	9/17/2012	Q3	Overweight
Road and Rail	UNP	Union Pacific Corporation		1.0%	118.61	65.45	1/4/2013	Q4	Overweight
Aerospace and Defense	BA	The Boeing Company		1.0%	129.95	128.51	7/3/2014	Q4	NA
Airlines	DAL	Delta Air Lines, Inc.		1.0%	49.18	31.76	2/21/2014	Q5	Overweight
Machinery	SPW	SPX Corporation		1.0%	85.87	101.85	9/12/2014	Q1	Overweight
Aerospace and Defense	UTX	United Technologies Corporation		2.0%	115.04	78.85	12/30/2010	Q4	Overweight
Information Technology			19.7%	19.0%					
Internet Software and Services	GOOGL	Google Inc.		5.0%	529.55	529.27	11/29/2013	Q4	Equal-Weight
Technology Hardware, Storage and Peripherals	AAPL	Apple Inc.		3.0%	109.33	60.34	1/6/2012	Q5	Overweight
Internet Software and Services	LNKD	LinkedIn Corporation		1.0%	229.65	192.62	2/21/2014	Q4	NC
Technology Hardware, Storage and Peripherals	HPQ	Hewlett-Packard Company		3.0%	40.24	28.34	1/3/2014	Q2	Overweight
Software	WDAY	Workday, Inc.		1.0%	80.41	67.41	5/10/2013	Q4	Equal-Weight
IT Services	XRX	Xerox Corporation		1.0%	13.75	12.39	10/13/2014	Q2	Overweight
IT Services	VNTV	Vantiv, Inc.		2.0%	33.76	31.95	8/8/2014	Q3	Overweight
IT Services	MA	MasterCard Incorporated		3.0%	85.68	34.60	1/17/2012	Q1	Overweight
Materials			3.2%	5.0%					
Chemicals	LYB	LyondellBasell Industries N.V.		1.0%	80.07	34.50	10/28/2011	Q1	Overweight
Chemicals	EMN	Eastman Chemical Co.		1.0%	76.48	77.03	11/29/2013	Q4	Equal-Weight
Metals and Mining	X	United States Steel Corp.		2.0%	26.59	33.35	11/28/2014	Q1	Overweight
Chemicals	MON	Monsanto Company		1.0%	119.74	79.02	4/5/2012	Q3	Overweight
Telecommunication Services			2.3%	2.0%					
Diversified Telecommunication Services	VZ	Verizon Communications Inc.		2.0%	46.96	50.59	11/28/2014	Q1	Overweight
Utilities			3.2%	1.0%					
Electric Utilities	EIX	Edison International		1.0%	65.51	45.44	1/3/2014	Q5	Overweight
			100%	100%					

Source: Thomson Reuters, Capital IQ, Morgan Stanley Research Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Price performance does not take transaction costs into account. For companies included in the portfolio, all important disclosures including personal holdings disclosures and Morgan Stanley disclosures appear on the Morgan Stanley public website at www.morganstanley.com/researchdisclosures. ++ Rating for this company has been removed from consideration in this report because, under applicable law and/or Morgan Stanley policy, Morgan Stanley may be precluded from issuing such information with respect to this company at this time. NC = Not covered

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The following analysts hereby certify that their views about the companies and their securities discussed in this report are accurately expressed and that they have not received and will not receive direct or indirect compensation in exchange for expressing specific recommendations or views in this report: Yaye Ba, Brian Hayes, Phillip Neuhart, Antonio Ortega, Adam Parker, Allison Rabkin Golden.

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(as of December 31, 2014)

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STOCK RATING CATEGORY	COVERAGE UNIVERSE		INVESTMENT BANKING CLIENTS (IBC)		
	COUNT	% OF TOTAL	COUNT	% OF TOTAL	% OF RATING IBC CATEGORY
Overweight/Buy	1156	35%	328	42%	28%
Equal-weight/Hold	1439	44%	354	45%	25%
Not-Rated/Hold	107	3%	17	2%	16%
Underweight/Sell	589	18%	84	11%	14%
TOTAL	3,291		783		

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