



THE MOTLEY FOOL®

To Educate, Amuse & Enrich

Fool's School

Be Thankful for What You Have

With Thanksgiving here again, it's appropriate to reflect on all we have and to realize that even those of us of modest means are still exponentially better off than billions of others on this planet. (To become more hopeful about the state of the world, visit www.Foolanthropy.com and learn about some amazing organizations. We'll be launching our 2007 charity drive there soon.)

Reflect on your financial condition, too, and know that it's not hopeless. Odds are, you're not too young, too old, too poor, too risk-averse or too ignorant to invest in stocks. However, as Motley Fool co-founders David and Tom Gardner have pointed out in "You Have More Than You Think: The Foolish Guide to Personal Finance" (Fireside, \$15), you might be overlooking some critical assets:

- You have brains. Managing your money takes brains, but you don't have to be a rocket scientist. A little reading (at www.fool.com and www.bankrate.com, for example) can help you avoid paying more than you need to for credit cards, mutual funds,

homes, cars and more.

- You have time. Even if you're 60, you may well have 30 years ahead of you, so don't write off investing. And if you're a teen, it's not too early. (Visit www.fool.com/teens for some guidance and www.lavamind.com for some fun, educational financial games.) If you plunk \$5,000 in an index fund that grows at the market's historical average of about 10 percent per year, in 30 years it will become \$87,000.

- You have other people. The taboo against talking about money is silly. Strike up conversations with friends and family. Your uncle might be a savvy, experienced investor. Your mother-in-law might know a lot about buying real estate. Perhaps a co-worker can recommend a terrific financial adviser (you might also find one at www.napfa.org). Or access online discussion boards (such as at www.boards.fool.com), where you can get advice and ideas from many people.

Finally, another nifty way to get savvy is to form an investment club. Learn more at www.betterinvesting.com. ■

Name That Company

I'm an agricultural cooperative founded in 1930 and owned by more than 750 growers in the United States and Canada. Most of my products are based on a fruit grown primarily in Wisconsin and Massachusetts that's commonly harvested in large beds of water. It's one of only three fruits native to North America. In 1995, I introduced dried Craisins. I'm North America's leading producer of canned and bottled juice



drinks, and my offerings are sold in dozens of countries around the world. I'm popular around the holidays. My annual sales top \$1 billion. Who am I?

Know the answer? Send it to us with Foolish Trivia on the top and you'll be entered into a drawing for a nifty prize! ■

The Motley Fool Take

USG Hits the Wallboard

Wallboard manufacturer USG's (NYSE: USG) third-quarter figures were terrible, but you might still want to look for an opportunity to snap up some shares.

For the quarter, sales fell 10 percent to \$1.3 billion, and net income plummeted 95 percent. USG's struggles were no surprise. New housing starts, which fell to 14-year lows, represent 40 percent of wallboard demand. Meanwhile, homebuilders have gotten creamed. Residential repair and remodeling, which account for 25 percent of wallboard demand, have started to weaken, too.

Only commercial construction, which accounts for about a third of wallboard sales, continues to perform well. In light of the ter-

rible housing market, wallboard pricing sank from \$188 per thousand square feet a year ago to \$122 currently.

The best thing for USG to do now is to stay disciplined and position itself better for the future. The company is building new, state-of-the-art facilities. This makes a big difference, as newer facilities can often produce wallboard at half the price of older ones.

USG should be patient and wait for the housing market to rebound. It's doing the right things in terms of repositioning and cutting operating expenses. Although it might take several years for the housing market to recover, USG shares should rebound once that happens. ■



My Dumbest Investment

Left Oracle Behind

Back in the early 1970s, I bought shares of a small company called Frontier Electric, as it was local and seemed to be expanding every day. Years later, I heard that the firm had been bought by another company. Since I'd never heard of the acquirer, some new upstart, I sold my stake in it. That company was Oracle. As they say, the rest is history (which was made without me).

— Harry, San Mateo, Calif.



The Fool Responds: Ouch. Oracle went public in 1986, and in a little over 21 years, its shares have increased in value more than 100-fold. Still, it would have been hard to know in 1986 how the company would ultimately do. If a holding of yours is acquired and you end up owning a company new to you, look into it closely. Some mergers and acquisitions make a lot of sense and add value. Others, such as Time Warner's merger with America Online, have yet to make shareholders rich. (In fact, there's now talk that Time Warner may spin off AOL.) ■



Do you have an embarrassing lesson learned the hard way? Boil it down to 100 words (or less) and send it to The Motley Fool c/o My Dumbest Investment. Got one that worked? Submit to My Smartest Investment. If we print yours, you'll win a Fool's cap!

Last week's trivia answer

I was founded in 1937, after Vernon Rudolph bought a doughnut shop and recipe from a French chef. I'm based in Winston-Salem, N.C., today. My more-than-400 stores in 41 states and several nations make more than 3 million doughnuts per day. The sprinkles I use each year would fill many 18-wheeler trucks. In my full-service stores, you can see my Hot Original Glazed doughnuts being made behind glass walls.

I went public in 2000, and my performance has foundered lately. My stock has fallen from the \$40s to below \$5. Who am I?

(Answer: Krispy Kreme Doughnuts) ■



Write to Us! Send questions for Ask the Fool, Dumbest (or Smartest) Investments (up to 100 words), and your Trivia entries to Fool@fool.com or via regular mail c/o this newspaper, attn: The Motley Fool. Sorry, we can't provide individual financial advice. ■

What Is This Thing Called The Motley Fool?

Remember Shakespeare? Remember "As You Like It"?

In Elizabethan days, Fools were the only people who could get away with telling the truth to the King or Queen.

The Motley Fool tells the truth about investing, and hopes you'll laugh all the way to the bank.

Ask the Fool

Is Adding Stocks Worth It?

Q I am invested in a range of mutual funds. Is it worth adding some individual stocks to that mix?

— B.W., Vail, CO

A Individual stocks can indeed boost your portfolio's performance, but they can also hurt it if you haven't taken the time to learn how to evaluate and choose them carefully. For most investors, broad-market index mutual funds are best, delivering returns that roughly match those of the market.

Still, you can aim to beat the market by investing in individual stocks. They can counteract the extreme diversification of most mutual funds. If your fund is invested in 200 different companies, your money is spread very thin across many holdings. If one

of them doubles in value, the effect on the fund's value will likely be fairly minor. But if you've invested, say, 5 percent to 10 percent of your money in a single stock and it doubles, it will boost your bottom line in a noticeable way. (Though if it falls, there will also be a noticeable effect.)

For many people, a good compromise might be to invest the bulk of their money in one or more broad-market index funds (such as one based on the S&P 500) and to invest in a few select stocks on the side. Just be sure to look for companies with rising revenues and earnings, increasing cash, little to no debt, strong competitive positions and attractive prices. Vanguard, at www.vanguard.com and 877-662-7447, has many terrific index funds. Learn more at www.fool.com/mutualfunds/mutualfunds.htm.

Q What's business "shrinkage"?

— A.K., Maryville, TN

A It's the routine loss of inventory, such as through accidental breakage or theft. Shoplifting, for example, shrinks many retailers' profits significantly.

Got a question for the Fool? Send it in — see Write to Us. ■

Figuratively Speaking

BY JOHN MACINTYRE
Special To Florida Weekly

Ranks of computers, peace and happiness, big-screen TVs, clothes, and money among the top holiday wish-list items in the United States, according to the Consumer Electronics Association: 1, 2, 3, 4

Rank of computers last year: 4

Source: Consumer Electronics Association.

Rank of Elvis Presley (\$49 million) on Forbes.com's "Top-Earning Dead Celebrities" list: 1

Rank of John Lennon with earnings of \$44 million: 2

Ranks of Charles M. Schulz (\$35 million), George Harrison (\$22 million), Albert Einstein (\$18 million), Andy Warhol (\$15 million),

Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, (\$13 million) and Tupac Shakur (\$9 million) on the list of top-earning dead celebrities: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Source: Forbes.com.

Percentage of Americans who know that the U.S. dollar has declined against other major currencies over the last few years, according to the results of a nationwide survey by Harris Interactive: 79

Percentage of adults who think it is bad for consumers: 68

Percentage who think it is bad for the American economy: 66

Source: Harris Interactive.

Ranks of Killeen, Texas, Minot, N.D., Arlington, Texas, and Canton, Ohio, among the least-expensive real estate markets in the United

States, according to a survey of 400 cities conducted by Coldwell Banker: 1, 2, 3, 4

Cost of an average home in Killeen, Texas: \$136,725

U.S. average: \$422,343

Cost of an average home in Dublin, Ireland, the most-expensive international real estate market in which Coldwell holds an office: \$2.1 million

Source: Coldwell Banker Real Estate Corp.

Percentage of Americans who say that the Internet can serve as a substitute for a significant other for some period of time, according to a poll by Zogby International attitudes poll: 24

Percentage of respondents who said they would be willing to safely implant a device that enabled them to use their mind to access the Internet: 11

Source: Zogby International.

Percentage of U.S. workers who say they eat

unhealthy snacks (chips, candy, etc.) at work at least once a week, according to a survey conducted by Nationwide Better Health: 72

Percentage of U.S. workers who say they eat unhealthy snacks three or more times a week, not including breakfast, lunch or dinner: 27

Percentage of workers who say they are provided with healthy food selections in their cafeterias or vending machines: 42

Source: Nationwide Better Health.

Percentage of Americans who say they don't think Social Security will survive beyond the baby boomer retirement era, according to a survey conducted by the American Payroll Association: 67

Source: American Payroll Association.

Idle Thought

"Persons appear to us according to the light we throw upon them from our own minds."

— Laura Ingalls Wilder