

THE MOTLEY FOOL®

To Educate, Amuse & Enrich

Fool's School

Finding a Tax Pro

We applaud those who do their own taxes. It's not unreasonable, though, to seek a professional to prepare your taxes.

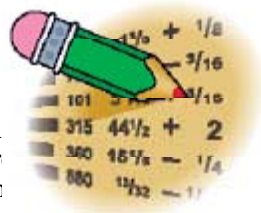
To find a good one, seek referrals from people whose business savvy you respect. Any accountant can buy advertising, but she can't buy satisfied clients. Ask for an interview. The accountant should be willing to give you some time (at no charge) to discuss and assess your situation. Ask her the following questions:

- How big is your firm? (How important will your business be to the company?)
- What are your fees and billing policies? (Ask for an estimate.)
- Who exactly will be preparing my taxes — you or somebody else? If I have problems or questions, do I speak with you?
- What are your continuing professional education (CPE) requirements, and how many CPE hours do you normally take each year? (If she exceeds the requirements, that's a good sign.)
- What research material do you use and subscribe to? (Answers like "CCH,"

"Research Institute" and "BNA" are encouraging. If the answer is merely current Federal Tax Handbook, run, don't walk, to the nearest exit. Sometimes complicated problems arise that require deep research. You don't want your tax geek just giving it her best shot. Being correct is always best when dealing with the IRS.)

- If my return is audited, will you represent me before the IRS? (She should go instead of you, not with you. If the accountant sources out the audit work, think twice before signing up. If she insists that you also be present at an audit, think a third time.)
- Can you get the return done in a few weeks? (It's March, after all!)

Finally, select someone with whom you're comfortable. She might be the best tax technician, but if you aren't comfortable with her, you'll hesitate to call her and might not provide the information she needs to do a good job for you. Learn more at www.fool.com/taxtime. ■



My Dumbest Investment

The Flame of Excitement Burns

As a young, destitute college student, I managed to miss the dot-com bust of the 2000s (whew!). As a recent grad, though, I began dabbling in the market. I perused numerous financial publications and felt the flame of excitement fill me. I hastily opened up a brokerage account. Frothing at the mouth, I immediately plunked everything into one stock. Rest assured, I did my research. I looked at the stock's chart and saw it was on a tear upward and read an article labeling it as one of 10 stocks with the potential to double within a year. I knew it manufactured some kind of alternative energy products or power generators, something like that. I sat back, satisfied, and watched as the shares immediately plummeted in mere days. Horrified, I sold everything, taking a 25 percent loss. Chastened by my first investing experience, I soon found myself learning more at The Motley Fool and elsewhere. I can sincerely say that my stock picks have now been much more well informed and successful.



— Collin Beatty, San Antonio ■



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](mailto:MyDumbestInvestment@fool.com). Got one that worked? Submit to [My Smartest Investment](mailto:MySmartestInvestment@fool.com). If we print yours, you'll win a Fool's cap!

Last week's trivia answer

I was founded in Chicago in 1918 by a 22-year-old who rented out a dozen Model T Fords. I was later owned by General Motors, RCA, United Airlines and Ford. Today, I'm the world's largest general-use car rental brand and the No. 1 airport car rental brand. I had 1,000 locations by 1955, and today they number nearly 8,000 in 145 nations. I now offer hourly rentals, as well as a "Green Collection" line of energy-efficient hybrid vehicles. I operate a top American equipment rental business. In 1994, I stopped using my most well-known celebrity endorser. Who am I? ■

(Answer: Hertz Corp.)



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

Look Before You LEAP

Q What are LEAPs?
— T.C., Oxnard, Calif.

A They're simply long-term options — ones that expire after more than a year from their issue date. Remember that a standard option lets you purchase the right to buy (via "call" options) or sell (via "put" options) a fixed number of shares of a stock at a fixed price within a fixed time period, typically a few months.

So if you think that Rubber Chicken Catering (ticker: CHEWY), which is trading at \$40 today, will soon be at \$60, you might buy call options for \$6 per share that let you buy the shares at \$45. That will ultimately cost you \$51 per share, netting you a \$9 profit — but only if the stock hits your target before the expiration date. Options such as these often end up expiring as worthless. That's why LEAPs, with their longer time frames, can be more attractive, despite costing more.

Options are not for beginning investors, and many advanced investors steer clear, too. Still, they can sometimes make sense. Learn more at www.cboe.com/learncenter, www.fool.com/foolFAQ/foolfaq0055.htm, and by clicking on "Options" in the blue band at www.fool.com/investing.htm.

Q How can I tell if a company is owned by (or owns) another company?
— J.P., Jacksonville, Fla.

A You can call the firm and ask its Investor Relations department. You can also visit its Web site. Most major companies have informative ones — look for a link titled something like "About Us," "Company Profile" or "Our History." A search at google.com can also yield valuable info.

You may be surprised which companies are related. Yum! Brands, for example, owns Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and KFC, among other names. Gap owns Old Navy, Banana Republic and Piperlime.

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

Name That Company

Founded in 1923 as a yarn company, I grew into America's first conglomerate. Today, based in Providence, R.I., I'm one of America's largest companies. Over time, I've gone from making parachutes and lingerie to industrial tools, golf carts, turf-care equipment and fuel tanks. Some of the brands under my roof include Bell Helicopter, Cessna Aircraft, Jacobsen, Kautex, Lycoming, E-Z-GO, Greenlee and Fluid & Power. My annual revenues are \$11 billion.



One-third of the world's operating helicopters carry the Bell Helicopter name, and Cessna planes make up the largest fleet of business jets in the world.

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

3M Is Worldwide

A small but impressive lineup of big U.S.-based companies has reported solid results this earnings season. They may not be shooting the lights out at home, but with help from afar, their overall performance is solid. Consider, for example, Minnesota-based 3M (NYSE: MMM), which makes everything from Post-it Notes to electronics. In the quarter just ended, all six of its operating units improved their sales by rates ranging from more than 22 percent for the health-care segment to a single percent in the display and graphics area.

Patrick Campbell, 3M's chief financial officer, discussed the company's international growth in a quarterly conference call, saying: "We drove

broad-based growth, with double-digit dollar sales growth in Europe, Latin America and Canada, excluding divestitures. Even after excluding the positive currency impacts, local currency growth was positive in every major region of the world."

So 3M joins such other big and diverse U.S.-based international players such as Caterpillar, Honeywell and General Electric in growing and expanding nearly worldwide.

This group of companies has sufficient international coverage to reward us with growing earnings. A subset of that group, which includes 3M, is able to generate increasing earnings both at home and abroad. With a yield recently above 2.4 percent, the company is worth taking a closer look at. ■



Figuratively Speaking

BY JOHN MACINTYRE
Special To Florida Weekly

Percentage of divorced Americans who report losing weight during or right after a divorce, according to a study by divorce360.com: 36

Percentage who changed jobs or got a new job: 33

Percentage who bought a car: 30

Percentage who bought furniture: 28

Source: divorce360.com.

Average number of hours that Americans are putting in at work each day, according to NSF's 2008 Sleep in America poll: 9.5

Estimated number of hours of additional work they do at home: 4.5

Percentage of those surveyed who say they only get a good night's sleep a few nights per month: 32

Source: [National Sleep Foundation](http://NationalSleepFoundation.com).

Percentage of open positions in 2007 that were filled by internal movement, according to CareerXroads Annual Sources of Hire Study: 30

Percentage of all external hires that were made based on referrals: 28.7

Percentage of external hires that were attributed to job boards: 25.7

Percentage of hires that were made from traditional print sources: 5

Source: [CareerXroads](http://CareerXroads.com).

Percentage of female middle managers who aspire to senior level positions, according to a Hudson research study: 77

Estimated percentage of women who ever achieve that goal: 25

Source: [Hudson](http://Hudson.com).

Ranks of London, New York and Moscow as the world's most expensive cities for residential apartment buyers, according to a survey by

the Global Property Guide: 1, 2, 3

Cost range per square meter of residential apartments in Prime Central London (includes Belgravia, Chelsea, Mayfair, Notting Hill, Knightsbridge, Regent's Park, South Kensington, St. John's Wood and St. James): \$21,800 to \$36,200

Cost range per square meter of residential apartments in Upper Manhattan: \$13,270 to \$22,923

Source: [Global Property Guide](http://GlobalPropertyGuide.com).

Estimated percentage of the world's online population that has used the Internet to make a purchase, according to Nielsen Global Online Survey on Internet shopping habits: 85

Number of people this represents: 875 million

Percentage increase in the market for online shopping in the past two years: 40

Source: [Nielsen Media Research](http://NielsenMediaResearch.com).

Percentage of U.S. males who say they have snooped on someone else's e-mail, according to a survey conducted by Google: 21

Percentage of women who say the same: 27

Source: [Google](http://Google.com).

Percentage of executives who said the CEOs of their organizations are very or completely willing to embrace strategies necessary to attract, assess and retain new generations of employees, according to a survey conducted by Stanton Chase International and Birkman International: 55

Rank of baby boomers as the most stable and loyal workforce in history with average employee tenure of 15 years in 1980 and 10 years in 2000: 1

In 2000, average tenure for Generation X (born 1965-1977): 5 years

Source: [Stanton Chase International](http://StantonChaseInternational.com).

Rank of Nevada as the nation's fastest-growing state, with a population increase of 2.9 percent between July 1, 2006, and July 1, 2007, according to estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau: 1

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](http://U.S.CensusBureau.com) ■

Idle Thought

"A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams."

— John Barrymore