



THE MOTLEY FOOL®

To Educate, Amuse & Enrich

Fool's School

Cast Those Proxy Votes

If you own shares of stock in individual companies (as opposed to through mutual funds), you've probably received proxy voting materials — ballots that arrive once a year along with your annual report. Many people wonder whether there's any point to voting, since most of us own so few shares, out of a typical company's millions (or billions) of shares.

Since institutional investors such as pension or mutual funds often own a majority of shares outstanding, our small votes can be moot. Still, sometimes they do make a difference. Shareholders have pressured McDonald's, for example, to look into reducing pesticides used on the potatoes it buys. They've also gotten many companies, such as Home Depot, to require two-thirds of their boards to approve executive compensation plans. On shareholder-raised issues, it's good to at least make your preference known, so read the materials and vote.

Here's some guidance to help you be a more involved shareholder:

- If you don't understand the issue(s)

at hand, seek guidance. Know that each company will typically explain how management wants you to vote, and it will also usually offer the shareholder proposal's position, too. At sites such as ProxyDemocracy.org, you'll find information on issues being voted on at companies.

- If you don't vote or if you leave your proxy items unmarked, your ballot will often automatically be counted as in agreement with management. (Some shareholder activists are working to change this.) If you're unsure of an issue, it's better to abstain, which will withhold your vote.

- If you're invested in a mutual fund, you can find out how the fund's proxies will be voted, either from the fund company itself or at ProxyDemocracy.org. Fund companies often offer voting guidelines to help you understand what the fund's positions are on various issues. If you're not offered such information, make a little noise and ask for it.

You can learn much more at sites such as www.socialinvest.org/projects/advocacy/proxyvoting.cfm, www.sec.gov/answers/proxy.htm and www.corpwatch.org. ■

My Dumbest Investment Profits Reversed

My buying 2,000 shares of a company for 65 cents per share in 1996 based on a cocktail party tip was very dumb. Two years later, the company executed a one-for-six reverse stock split, leaving me with 333 shares. The stock price was soon 25 cents per share, and it kept dropping. In 2006, it filed for bankruptcy protection. No more "hot tips" for me!

— M.S.Z., Sun City West, Ariz.

The Fool Responds: Technically, a reverse split doesn't affect the value of your holdings. One hundred shares of a \$10 stock are worth \$1,000, as are 50 shares of a \$20 stock, after a one-for-two split. However, companies don't usually do reverse splits unless they're facing some challenges, so we should see them as red flags. (A reverse split can make a stock price look less embarrassing, among other things.) Companies that have recently executed or announced plans for reverse splits include Citigroup, Borders, Rite Aid and Time Warner. Your main error, as you know now, is buying on the basis of a hot tip — always do your own research and thinking before buying anything. ■



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 born in 1913, when five Californians (a banker, miner, bookkeeper, lawyer and purveyor of wood and coal) pooled \$500 to create the Electro-Alkaline Co., America's first commercial liquid bleach maker. Today, I'm a leading consumer products enterprise, taking in more than \$5 billion annually and paying a 3.7 percent dividend. My brand names include Armor All, STP, Fresh Step, Scoop Away, Kingsford, Hidden Valley, KC Masterpiece, Brita, Burt's Bee's and Glad. I was bought by Procter & Gamble in 1957, but antitrust concerns led to me regaining my independence in 1969. Who am I? ■

(Answer: Clorox)



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

Insiders Selling

QI saw that some insiders at Activision Blizzard have recently sold about 3 million shares of its stock. When insiders sell thousands or millions of shares, who are the buyers?

— P.D., Biloxi, Miss.

A Shares sold by insiders such as officers, directors or owners of a company are sold in the market, where for every seller there's usually a buyer. The catch is that if there are many more shares for sale than there are interested buyers, the price will drop — until it reaches a point at which buyers will buy.

Those 3 million shares might seem like an awful lot to us, but remember that in the course of a typical trading day, many companies experience a high volume of trading. In recent months, about 16 million shares of Activision Blizzard have been bought and sold each day. By contrast, General Electric's average volume tops 175 million shares, and The Washington Post Co.'s is just 40,000 or so.

It can be smart to examine insider purchases and sales for companies that interest you. Some occasional selling is routine, but someone unloading a large portion of his shares can be a red flag. When insiders buy, though, it's hard to take that as anything but a bullish sign.

QCan you recommend any books on value investing?

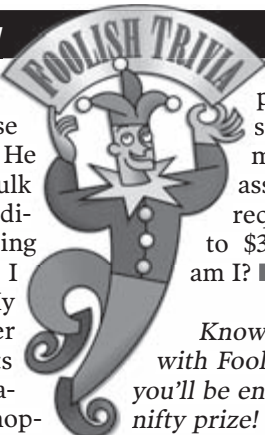
— L.W., Flint, Mich.

A Try "Value Investing: From Graham to Buffett and Beyond" by Bruce Greenwald et al. (Wiley, \$20) or "The Intelligent Investor" by Benjamin Graham (Collins, \$22). "One Up On Wall Street" by Peter Lynch and John Rothchild (Simon & Schuster, \$15), meanwhile, offers a good introduction to investing, as do many Motley Fool books. ■

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

Name That Company

I was founded in Sweden in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad, whose initials form part of my name. He began by buying matches in bulk as a child and reselling them individually, before moving on to selling seeds, fish and ballpoint pens. I issued my first catalog in 1951. My "democratic design" aims to offer affordable and beautiful products to the masses. I'm a private company, with more than 550 million shop-



pers visiting my 250-plus stores annually. Many of my products require some assembly, but my meatballs require none. I rake in close to \$30 billion annually. 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

Coca-Cola in China

Citing Coca-Cola's "market dominance in carbonated soft drinks" in China, the nation's Ministry of Commerce recently rejected Coke's bid to acquire China Huiyuan Juice Group (CHJ), fearing that the acquisition would limit competition in China's juice market.

This may not be such bad news for Coca-Cola shareholders. China is already Coke's fastest-growing market, with quarterly unit volume up 29 percent year over year. And Coke's \$2.4 billion bid was rather pricey, at 45 times CHJ's estimated profits for this year, when long-term growth expectations for CHJ are 30 percent.

Pundits have noted that Coke offered

a 200 percent premium to CHJ's pre-bid market price, suggesting just how crazy a price Coke was willing to pay. Strong growth is available elsewhere. In Russia, for example, its biggest independent and publicly traded player, Wimm-Bill-Dann, was recently priced around 0.4 times sales, vs. the 6.5-times-sales price Coke was offering for CHJ.

Coca-Cola's desire to get an edge on PepsiCo in China, snagging 43 percent share of the juice market by buying CHJ, is understandable. But valuation matters. It always matters.

And that, Fools, is why Coke's "bad" news is actually good news for shareholders — and why investors were wrong to sell shares of the stock based on the news. ■

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Storm Smart launches 'We Care' program

Storm Smart Industries, the largest hurricane protection company in Florida, has launched the "We Care" program, intended to protect the homes of needing, deserving residents of Southwest Florida.

Throughout each month through the 2009 Hurricane Season (June-November), Storm Smart will accept nominations via e-mail and review each of them. At the first of each month the Selection Committee will award a complete storm protection package to one deserving household. This will include code-approved protection on all eligible openings of the home, at absolutely no cost to the homeowner.

Nominations can be submitted by

anyone to WeCare@StormSmart.com. Include the name, address and phone number of the nominee, any pertinent details you think the selection committee should know, along with your contact information for possible follow-up questions. The only stipulation is the home must be owner-occupied.

"Southwest Florida has been very good to us and we feel strongly about the 'pay it forward' way of thinking," said Storm Smart CEO Brian Rist. "If we can identify those who are most in need, we feel a civic responsibility to help where we can. This is our community, let's look out for each other."

For further information, go to www.StormSmart.com. ■

Cache opens at Bell Tower Shops

Cache, retailer of women's sportswear and dresses, has opened its newest location at Bell Tower Shops. Targeting style-conscious women from 25 to 45, Cache has 293 stores in 43 states, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. The 2,000-square-foot Bell Tower Shops location, managed by Elaine Freitas, is located along the Saks Fifth Avenue corridor and most easily accessed from the entrance near Bacchus.

"Cache's sophisticated apparel and accessories, boutique format and high level of client service is a perfect fit with Bell Tower Shops," said Becky Thompson, general manager of the center.

Cache offers a broad mix of sophis-

ticated, upscale high fashion apparel and accessories from European and domestic designers, many exclusive to Cache. The store is also a destination for holiday, prom and other special event outfits.

Bell Tower Shops is an open-air lifestyle center, located at U.S. 41 and Daniels Parkway, with 40 retailers, including Saks Fifth Avenue and The Fresh Market, nine restaurants and Bell Tower 20 Regal Cinemas. The center's sidewalk garden setting of lush landscaping, splashing fountains and covered walkways makes it a popular gathering place. To learn more, log onto www.TheBellTowerShops.com, or call 489-1221. ■