Déjà Vu?

Newsletter: 2008-Vol. I

Commenting on the recent plunge in stock prices, a *Barron's* columnist made the following observations in his column appearing January 27:

"Poll ratings on President Bush's handling of the economy fell last week among the American voting public. Global investors' opinion of his stance toward Iraq dropped at least as much. With both of these constituencies turning nervous, stocks and the US dollar declined hard in a mutually reinforcing manner, dragging the stock gauges into the red for the young year. . . . Perhaps as worrisome, many company conference calls feature grim talk of slim revenue growth opportunities. Companies such as AT&T, Caterpillar, McDonald's and Merrill Lynch all tempered their outlook for revenues this year— more proof of how tough it is to manage in a low nominal growth economy, in which demand isn't strengthening much and prices are tough to increase. . . . There's something to the idea that the stock market is safer because so many fear it. But in the absence of better economic and profit performance, who's to say how indifferent or fearful investors can get before a lasting market rise emerges?"

Sound a bit fishy? OK, perhaps we were economical with the true date of this quote.

Although much of the article reads as if it were published yesterday, it actually appeared five years ago on Monday, January 27, 2003. Stock prices at that time had stumbled out of the gate for the New Year, alarming those who are convinced that performance in January is a reliable guide for the rest of the year. Over the very short term, the pessimistic tone of the column provided a useful warning—the S&P 500® Index slumped another 7% over the subsequent six weeks, closing at 800.73 on March 11. But that proved to be the low for the year, and the S&P 500® surged 38.86% between March 11 and year-end 2003. Total return with dividends reinvested for the year as a whole was 28.69%. And the four stocks cited as examples of a weakening economy did even better, with an average total return of 45.2%.

There is no assurance that 2008 will achieve a similarly positive result, but the behavior of stock prices in 2003 suggests that fixating on every weekly wiggle can lead to disappointing results for those seeking long-term investment success.

For additional information on how to put together a well-diversified long-term investing program, feel free to contact Ken Weingarten at (609) 620-1770.

S&P data provided by Standard & Poor's Index Services Group.
Santoli, Michael. "Stocks Tumble Along With Bush Approval Ratings." *Barron's,* January 27, 2003.
Standard & Poor's. *Stock Guide,* January 2004.
Yahoo! Inc. *Yahoo! Finance*. In http://finance.yahoo.com, accessed January 28, 2008.