

Why Do Dividend Strategies Tend to Outperform?

■ by **Cliff Remily, CFA**
Portfolio Manager

In an earlier article, we addressed how we look for companies that have an ability and willingness to pay increasing dividends. We illustrated how high and rising dividends tend to outperform the market and briefly described how independent academic and practitioner research has shown that just because a company pays a dividend does not mean the company cannot grow its earnings. In this paper, we delve deeper into the supportive research and provide two specific holdings as examples. The importance of these findings is to illustrate how we look to pay a rising dividend over time. The way we accomplish this is to buy companies that are able to grow their earnings power and increase the dividend along with the increase in earnings.

One primary role of a public company's management team is to allocate capital among various projects to maximize returns for shareholders. Unfortunately, conflicts can arise between management and minority shareholders. For instance, a CEO may have a pet project that continually loses money yet receives annual funding. Another conflict is that the highest returning projects may entail

more risk than the manager wants to take, for risk of losing his or her job. This can hurt shareholders if the risk versus reward trade-off is in favor of taking the project. Finally, management teams may engage in empire building, acquiring companies at a premium in order to grow their own organizations. This occurs from ego as well as the likelihood that the management team is compensated more for managing a larger company.

The managers of the Thornburg Investment Income Builder Fund believe capital allocation decisions are one of the critical long-term driving forces for company success and, ultimately, stock performance.

How can we determine if a company is allocating capital correctly? Without perfect foresight, we have to rely on history, current decisions, and management guidance. One indication that management takes capital allocation seriously is through its dividend policy. A dividend monetizes a portion of earnings for minority shareholders, which retained earnings do not. This brings the present value of future cash flows forward, and all else being equal, raises the value of the firm. Companies with good business models generate higher metrics of profitability such as return on

Surprise! Higher Dividends = Higher Earnings Growth
Real Subsequent 10-year Earnings Growth

		Average	Worst	Best
S&P 500 Index 1946-91				
Lowest	Quartile 1	-0.40%	-3.40%	-3.20%
	Quartile 2	1.30%	-2.40%	5.70%
	Quartile 3	2.70%	-1.10%	6.60%
Highest	Quartile 4	4.20%	0.60%	11.00%

Source: Robert D. Arnott and Clifford S. Asness, "Surprise! Higher Dividends = Higher Earnings Growth", Financial Analysts Journal, Jan/Feb 2003. Data analyzed: 1946-2001.

equity (ROE) as well as cash flows. This cash needs to be deployed, and when a company has a high ROE, it takes less retained earnings to grow the business relative to those with lower ROE. Along with many subjective and qualitative factors, we look for these companies that have strong business models as well as the ability and willingness to allocate capital prudently.

We've often discussed the original study by Arnott and Asness titled "Surprise! Higher Dividends = Higher Earnings Growth" The authors were the first to find that companies with higher payout ratios actually had higher real earnings growth over the subsequent 10-year period. This is counter-intuitive, as one would expect a dividend-paying stock to translate into low growth. The table above provides the results of the study, clearly illustrating

that companies paying out more cash as dividends (quartile four) had the highest subsequent 10-year EPS growth.

In every case over these rolling 10-year periods from 1946 to 1991, the highest dividend payers had the highest earnings growth. These results were not just on average, but were robust through the strongest and weakest markets as well. We share the authors' opinion that it is possible to have high earnings growth without paying dividends. In fact, most growth companies that have annual growth rates of 20%, 30%, or more, typically do not pay dividends since they need this capital to sustain their investment opportunities. However, we believe growth rates of this magnitude are few and far between and not sustainable over the longer term. A growth manager skilled at

analyzing high-growth companies should be able to navigate this segment of the market. The point of this study is not to diminish growth as an investing style, but rather to show that historically dividend-paying stocks on average do indeed grow earnings over the long term at higher than average rates.

The results were consistent with the original Arnott and Asness study, providing very robust evidence that this is a phenomenon worthy of attention when analyzing the long-term expectations of stocks. They validate our pursuit of companies that have an ability and willingness to pay dividends.

The relationship between dividends and growth is not confined to domestic companies. The same study was replicated in multiple markets, including Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. The results are listed below and on the right. In Canada and Australia, the study focused on the ten-year subsequent earnings per share (EPS) growth, while the others used five-year growth rates.

These studies were built off the Arnott and Asness research and were tested to ensure statistical validity (e.g., accounting for high payout due to temporary earnings weakness, which could result in earnings recovering faster than the market). Although history is not a perfect indicator of the future, it is comforting to have the above studies support our belief that capital allocation and payout policy matter. This goes to the core of our investment

Continued

Do Higher Dividends Lead to Higher Earnings Growth? By K.C. Parker

Real Subsequent 10-year Earnings Growth

		Average	Worst	Best
TSX Composite Jan-56 to Sep-05 (Canada)				
Lowest	Quartile 1	-4.1%	-16.7%	5.8%
	Quartile 2	-0.1%	-17.0%	7.9%
	Quartile 3	3.2%	-16.2%	7.1%
Highest	Quartile 4	6.3%	-21.0%	34.6%
S&P 500 Jan-56 to Sep-05 (United States)				
Lowest	Quartile 1	-0.3%	-3.4%	4.1%
	Quartile 2	1.4%	-3.0%	6.0%
	Quartile 3	2.5%	-1.0%	6.6%
Highest	Quartile 4	3.2%	0.9%	7.1%
ASX Composite Jul-69 to Sep-05 (Australia)				
Lowest	Quartile 1	-3.0%	-10.2%	-0.9%
	Quartile 2	0.6%	-5.3%	6.2%
	Quartile 3	1.3%	-6.6%	6.7%
Highest	Quartile 4	3.3%	-2.8%	12.7%

Source: K.C. Parker, "Do Higher Dividends Lead to Higher Earnings Growth?", Simon Fraser University, 2005.

International Evidence on the Payout Ratio, Earnings, Dividends, and Returns

Real Subsequent 5-year Earnings and Dividend Growth

		Earnings	Dividends
France 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	6.2%	2.9%
	Quartile 2	8.7%	18.1%
	Quartile 3	9.7%	8.9%
Highest	Quartile 4	20.1%	14.8%
Germany 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	3.5%	-0.8%
	Quartile 2	-0.6%	6.7%
	Quartile 3	9.3%	6.1%
Highest	Quartile 4	17.1%	18.2%
Japan 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	-6.5%	-2.3%
	Quartile 2	3.1%	-2.6%
	Quartile 3	7.4%	9.2%
Highest	Quartile 4	12.3%	12.1%
Netherlands 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	3.8%	2.5%
	Quartile 2	9.0%	19.2%
	Quartile 3	15.3%	14.4%
Highest	Quartile 4	21.3%	8.9%
Switzerland 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	0.7%	-0.7%
	Quartile 2	2.2%	8.2%
	Quartile 3	14.5%	7.4%
Highest	Quartile 4	17.0%	19.4%
United Kingdom 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	5.8%	-1.4%
	Quartile 2	11.4%	13.6%
	Quartile 3	8.6%	11.9%
Highest	Quartile 4	13.0%	14.6%
United States 1973-04			
Lowest	Quartile 1	7.7%	6.6%
	Quartile 2	6.1%	5.0%
	Quartile 3	3.3%	10.9%
Highest	Quartile 4	16.8%	11.4%

Source: Owain ap Gwilym, James Seaton, Karina Suddason, and Stephen Thomas, "International Evidence on the Payout Ratio, Earnings, Dividends, and Returns", Financial Analysts Journal, Jan/Feb 2006.

philosophy in the Thornburg Investment Income Builder Fund.

Two examples of companies in the portfolio that exhibit strong capital discipline are Coca Cola (KO) and Sysco (SY). Although these are in two different industries, they both have a history of displaying a willingness and an ability to pay dividends. In fact, over the previous decade, KO has increased its dividend by 9.2% annually and Sysco by 15.6%. These types of investments help support the Investment Income Builder Fund's goals of paying an attractive dividend today and increasing the annual distribution over time.

KO is a non-alcoholic beverage company that primarily develops, markets, and distributes both carbonated and non-carbonated drinks worldwide. KO's business model is enviable as it generates significant returns on its capital employed, thus producing significant amounts of free cash flow before debt service payments, dividends, and share repurchases. This company acts as a ballast in almost any portfolio as it fundamentally performs year in and year out. Over the past five years the dividend payout ratio has been

50% and the company has had a net share repurchase ratio of 20% over this period as well. Together this totals an astounding 70% in total payout of earnings to shareholders.

Sysco is a food distribution company that provides food to restaurants, hospitals, education facilities, and other health facilities. The company has increased its dividend at a 10-year CAGR of 15.6% while growing earnings at a 9.0% rate over the same period. This is a true consistent earner that certainly feels the effects of the current downturn in consumer spending; but due to its low cost of capital and debt levels, Sysco takes advantage of buying smaller competitors. This accelerates growth rates as the economy recovers from its naturally occurring recessions.

The Investment Income Builder Fund paid a \$0.50 per share dividend in 2003 and for the year ending 2010, \$1.13. This is a 12% CAGR rate over seven years. We could not have achieved this increase without investing in companies with growing earnings. We scour the globe looking for the companies that we believe can balance the goals of paying an attractive dividend and finding future growth projects.

Thornburg Investment Income Builder Fund Class A Share Performance as of 3/31/11

	Average Annual Total Returns			
	1-Yr	3-Yr	5-Yr	Incep.
Without sales charge	13.58%	4.92%	7.26%	12.26%
With sales charge	8.44%	3.32%	6.28%	11.64%
Blended Benchmark*	11.71%	1.62%	3.41%	7.87%
S&P 500 Index	15.65%	2.35%	2.62%	7.02%

30-Day SEC Yield A shares: 4.49%

Performance data shown represents past performance and is no guarantee of future results. Investment return and principal value will fluctuate so shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance may be lower or higher than quoted. For performance current to the most recent month end, visit thornburg.com or call 800-847-0200. The maximum sales charge for the Fund's A shares is 4.50%. The Fund's A shares carry a 30-day redemption fee of 1%. The total annual fund operating expenses for A shares are 1.25%.

* 75% MSCI World and 25% Barclays Aggregate Bond Index.

Other unsustainable means of generating income include 1) writing covered call options; 2) buying companies with increasing payout ratios, which will come to an end once the average payout reaches 100%; 3) constantly trading up for higher-yielding investments. All of these are unsustainable in our opinion and are not how we manage the Thornburg Investment Income Builder Fund. Fortunately, there are historical studies that support our view on the importance of capital allocation in meeting the long-term goals of the Fund. ■

Following a dividend-focused strategy does not assure or guarantee better performance and cannot eliminate the risk of investment losses.

Data presented are the most recent available. Inclusion of subsequent periods could change the results.

The views expressed by the Portfolio Managers reflect their professional opinions and should not be considered buy or sell recommendations. These views are subject to change.

There is no guarantee the fund will meet its investment objectives. Investments in the Fund carry risks including possible loss of principal. Investing outside the United States involves additional risks, such as currency fluctuations. Additionally, the Fund invests a portion of the assets in small capitalization companies, which may increase the risk of greater price fluctuations. As with direct bond ownership, funds that invest in bonds are subject to certain risks including interest rate risk, credit risk, and inflation risk. The principal value of bonds will fluctuate relative to changes in interest rates, decreasing when interest rates rise. Investments in the Fund are not FDIC insured, nor are they deposits of or guaranteed by a bank or any other entity.

This communication is not authorized for distribution to prospective investors in the Fund unless preceded or accompanied by an effective prospectus. Investors should consider the Fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses carefully before investing. The prospectus contains this and other information about the Fund.

Thornburg Investment Income Builder Fund's top 10 equity holdings, as of 3/31/11: 1. Telstra Corp. Ltd. 2.8%; 2. Enel SpA 2.7%; 3. Total SA 2.4%; 4. Royal Dutch Shell plc 2.3%; 5. Philip Morris 2.3%; 6. Pfizer, Inc. 2.2%; 7. Eni SpA 2.1%; 8. Telefonica SA 2.0%; 9. Vodafone Group plc 1.9%; and 10. Koninklijke 1.9%.

Thornburg Investment Income Builder Fund's top 5 bond holdings, as of 3/31/11: 1. KKR Financial Holdings LLC 1.1%; 2. Southern Cross Air Corp. 0.8%; 3. iShares High Yield Corporate Bond 0.7%; 4. Swiss Re Capital I, LP 0.6%; and 5. Enel Finance International S.A. 0.5%.

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) – The year-over-year growth rate of an investment over a specified period of time. It describes the rate at which an investment would have grown if it grew at a steady rate.

Dividend Payout Ratio – A fraction that expresses dividend payments as a percentage of per-share earnings.

Return on Equity (ROE) – A measure of a corporation's profitability. The ROE is useful in comparing the profitability of a company to other firms in the same industry.

Earnings Per Share (EPS) – The total earnings divided by the number of shares outstanding.

Price/Earnings Ratio (P/E ratio) – The price of a share of stock divided by earnings per share, usually calculated using the latest year's earnings.

Reserve Replacement Ratio (RRR) – A metric used by investors to judge the operating performance of an oil and gas exploration and production company. The reserve replacement ratio measures the amount of proved reserves added to a company's reserve base during the year relative to the amount of oil and gas produced.

S&P 500 Index – An unmanaged broad measure of the U.S. stock market.

The Blended Index is composed of 25% Barclays Capital Aggregate Bond Index and 75% MSCI World Index. The Barclays Capital Aggregate Bond Index is composed of approximately 8,000 publicly traded bonds including U.S. government, mortgage-backed, corporate and Yankee bonds. The index is weighted by the market value of the bonds included in the index. The MSCI World Index is an unmanaged market-weighted index that consists of securities traded in 24 of the world's most developed countries. Securities are listed on exchanges in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Far East. The index is calculated with net dividends reinvested, in U.S. dollars.

The performance of any index is not indicative of the performance of any particular investment. Unless otherwise noted, index returns reflect the reinvestment of income dividends and capital gains, if any, but do not reflect fees, brokerage commissions or other expenses of investing. Investors may not make direct investments into any index.