An Atypical Investment Strategy

We manage both the IVA Worldwide and IVA International Funds with a dual attempt that is unusual in the mutual fund world: in the short-term (12-18 months), we attempt to preserve capital, while over the longer-term (5-10 years, i.e., over a full economic cycle), we seek to perform better than the MSCI All Country World Index in the case of your IVA Worldwide Fund and the MSCI All Country World Ex-U.S. Index in the case of your IVA International Fund.

The Worldwide Fund is typically used by investors who are looking for an “all weather fund” where we are given the latitude to decide how much we should have invested in the U.S. versus outside the U.S. The International Fund is typically used by investors who practice asset allocation and want to decide for themselves how much should be allocated to a domestic manager and how much should be allocated to a pure “international” (i.e., non-U.S.) manager yet at the same time are looking for a lower risk – and lower volatility – exposure to international markets than may be obtained from a more traditional international fund.

We believe our investment approach is very different from the traditional approach of most mutual funds. We are trying to deliver returns that are as absolute as possible, i.e. returns that try to be as resilient as possible in down markets, while many of our competitors try to deliver good relative performance, i.e. try to beat a benchmark, and thus would be fine with being down 15% if their benchmark is down 20%.

Why do we have such an unusual strategy (which, incidentally is not easy to carry out)? Because we believe this strategy makes sense for many investors. We are fond of the quote by Mark Twain: “There are two times in a man’s life when he should not speculate: the first time is when he cannot afford to; the second time is when he can.” We realize that many investors cannot tolerate high volatility and appreciate that “life’s bills do not always come at market tops.” This strategy also appeals to us at International Value Advisers since we “eat our own cooking” for a significant part of our savings (invested in IVA products) and we have an extreme aversion to losing money.

An Eclectic Investment Approach

Here is how we try to implement our strategy:

- We don’t hug benchmarks. In practical terms, this means we are willing to make big “negative bets,” i.e., having nothing or little in what has become big in the benchmark. Conversely, we will generally seek to avoid overly large positive bets.

- We prefer having diversified portfolios (typically 100 to 150 names). Because we invest on a global basis, we believe that diversification helps protect against weak corporate governance or insufficient disclosure, or simply against “unknown unknowns.”

- We like the flexibility to invest in small, medium and large companies, depending on where we see value.

- We attempt to capture equity-type returns through fixed income securities but predominantly when credit markets (or sub-sets of them) are depressed and offer this potential.

- We hold some gold, either in bullion form or via gold mining securities, as we believe gold provides a good hedge in either an inflationary or deflationary period, and it can help mitigate currency debasement over time.

- We are willing to hold cash when we cannot find enough cheap securities that we like or when we find some, yet the broader market (Mr. Market) seems fully priced. We will seek to use that cash as ammunition for future bargains.

- At the individual security level, we ask a lot of questions about “what can go wrong?” and will establish not only a “base case intrinsic value” but also a “worst case scenario.” (What could prove us wrong? If we were wrong, are we likely to lose 25%, 30%, or even more of the money invested?). As a result, we will miss some opportunities, yet hopefully, we will also avoid instances where we experience a permanent impairment of value.