



# Berkshire

## DIVIDEND STRATEGY

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### Berkshire Dividend Strategy – Detailed Portfolio Construction Narrative

Berkshire employs a two-step bottom up process focusing on high, sustainable return on equity and risk adjusted intrinsic value. As we evaluate profitability, financial strength and growth of dividends, we highlight how these factors are deeply intertwined with our valuation process.

#### *Higher than average profitability*

- Process goal: How does the company generate higher than average ROE and is it sustainable?
- DuPont formula: Inspires unique, probing questions about each business
- Resulting companies: high margin cash generators with low capital requirements

Our process begins by identifying companies demonstrating a high and sustainable level of profitability as measured by return on shareholder's equity (ROE). ROE is our financial yard stick to help understand the company's future cash flow potential and to quantify how effective management is at employing capital. ROE helps us assess and decompose profitability and dividend growth potential. Profitability is carefully evaluated by analyzing competitive advantages, pricing power, health of end markets, company management, cash flow diversification, industry advantages, intellectual property, and other factors.

Next, analysis of the company's duPont formula helps us answer the question: HOW does the company generate profit? Is it generated through high profit margins, efficient use of assets, management of taxes or use of financial leverage? Investment committee discussions lead to a cascade of questions about the factors relevant to each individual business. Overall, Berkshire company selections tend to enjoy above average profit margins, low capital intensity, wide moats, consistent and abundant cash flow and high incremental returns on capital.

#### *Stronger than average financial strength*

- Focus on quality, established companies with abundant free cash flow and self-funding balance sheets
- Dividends well covered by free cash flow
- Low to modest leverage comparatively
- Discern organic growth vs. financial engineering

As bottom-up fundamental investors focused on quality, balance sheet and income statement analysis play major roles in our process. We seek companies with established business models, low capital intensity, and self-funding balance sheets that do not need to access capital markets to fund operations or expansions. Financial strength can lead to attractive dividend growth and allow management to remain flexible and opportunistic as it weighs capital allocation decisions.

While dividend growth is a positive factor, we do not take a history of growing the dividend at face value. Many companies have used various financial engineering techniques to increase distributions to shareholders. Eventually these techniques fail. Our process is specifically designed to identify companies with dividends well covered by free cash flow and will likely uncover companies employing various forms of financial engineering.

**Berkshire** is a fee-based, SEC registered advisory firm serving the portfolio management needs of high net worth and institutional clients. Over the past 30 years, we have successfully implemented highly focused equity, fixed income and balanced portfolios. Our guiding principle is a belief that success is achieved by combining rigorous, well-crafted investment processes with an exceptional level of client service and attention to detail. Asset Management with a Difference... Diligence, Integrity, and Focus.

#### **Dividend Highlights**

- Dividend growth can often provide transparent insight into a company's fundamentals and vitality.
- Dividend growth can provide an attractive stream of increasing cash flow to satisfy many financial objectives.

Since shareholders are the last providers of capital to get distributions, we seek companies with appropriate leverage. Some companies with exceptionally stable businesses and highly regular cash flows can be leveraged more fully to optimize shareholder returns (by lowering average cost of capital). If the company has very erratic revenue and cash flow, leverage should be avoided unless management is extremely adroit at predicting their unique business cycle.

### ***Above average growth***

- Dividend growth demonstrates company health, vitality and offers important component of total return
- Wall Street orientation: near term rate of growth
- Berkshire focus: duration and sustainability of growth, capitalizing on short sightedness of others.

We believe companies having the ability to compound dividends and grow cash flow at above average growth rates have provided significant value over time. Dividend growth is a sign of company health and vitality.

We dig deeply into each company's potential for future cash flow and dividend growth. Among other factors, we examine the health of their brand, intellectual property, network effects, long run pricing power, financial strength/flexibility and the ability to maintain high incremental returns on capital. In conjunction we use ROE analysis to model long run earnings power and optimal capital structure to assess future dividend growth.

We find Wall Street has a short sighted obsession with near term earnings and the rate of growth. If our investors are to enjoy the significant benefits of compounding dividends, our focus remains on the duration and sustainability of dividend growth over a 3, 5 and even 10 year period of time. Many of our most successful opportunities developed as a result of Wall Street indiscriminately selling due a near term earnings miss or temporary problems having little to do with Berkshire long term thesis.

### ***Below average valuation***

- Buy decision: greater than 20% discount to intrinsic value
- Statistical cheapness vs. overall business value
- True valuation work requires intimate knowledge of fundamentals
- Sell discipline: 95-100% intrinsic value, change in fundamentals, better idea
- Quality growth + value = good upside, lower volatility

While we seek quality businesses that will grow future dividends, valuation plays a major role in our process. The price an investor pays for an investment ultimately determines the rate of return. We seek to add names to the portfolio if there is a significant discount (greater than 20%) on measured intrinsic value versus current price.

To us, value is not defined merely by screening static measures of statistical cheapness (low p/e, low p/b, etc.). These measurements only capture a certain price metric vs a certain fundamental data series at a static point in time. Alternatively, we believe a discounted cash flow model is the most comprehensive tool to synthesize relevant data about valuation.

A discounted cash flow model allows the portfolio manager to make a forward-looking assessment of fundamental measures across three dimensions: the current cash flow, the estimated growth of cash flow, and the risks to the cash flow. We estimate future the cash flows and discount them using a risk free rate, an equity risk premium and the firm's 'opinion beta'. Traditional beta calculations measure a stock's price volatility vs. an index. We find this as an ineffective way to accurately measure the risk of a given business. Alternatively, our 'opinion beta' allows the analyst to measure and express the perceived riskiness of the underlying business: volatility of operating margins, balance sheet leverage, and liquidity of stock. We believe this is most consistent with the approach an entrepreneur would take if they were to acquire the whole company.

Valuation inputs (current cash flow, growth and risk) require probing questions about the business and inspire exhaustive insight into companies. For example, when valuing a company in our model, you cannot compare the discount rate used to capitalize a stream of cash flows for biotech and pharma firms without evaluating the unique risks to each model. Most mature pharma companies have a diverse range of products with well-established revenue streams, while biotech companies may be reliant on a single product. This can and must be expressed through varying discount rates (the opinion beta) to account for consistency of cash flow. This exercise is paramount to the process as each individual portfolio manager must defend their inputs to the committee.

Our sell discipline is 95-100% of intrinsic value, or a meaningful deterioration in fundamentals (i.e. change in operating margins, loss of competitive advantage, structural change in business model, poor acquisition).

We believe the combination of quality and not overpaying for a company provides good upside and also protects capital in down markets.

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*Definitions: The S & P 500 Index is a market capitalization weighted index of the largest 500 U.S. stocks. It is a market-value weighted index (stock price times # of shares outstanding), with each stock's weight in the index proportionate to its market value. The index is designed to measure changes in the economy and is representative of most major industries. You cannot invest directly in an index. Beta is a measure of volatility vs. an index. Current yield is the mean estimated annual dividend amount based on current calendar year, divided by the current stock price. Dividend Payout ratio is the fraction of net income a firm pays to its shareholders in dividends, in percentage. Forward Price Earnings Ratio (P/E) is the ratio of the price of a stock and the company's projected earnings per share. Upside/Downside capture ratios refer to a portfolio's performance as a percentage of either positive returns (upside) or negative returns (downside) vs. an index. Standard Deviation is a measure of total risk. Return on equity (ROE) measures profitability by dividing dollars of profit by shareholders' equity. If represented in this presentation - Alpha, Beta and capture ratios are generally presented as calculated by Morningstar.*

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