CAMBRIDGEASSOCIATES LLC

## U.S. MARKET COMMENTARY

## WHY NOT HOLD CASH?

## May 2007

## EricWinig <br> JessicaDiedzic <br> Courtney Couper

## Copyright © 2007 by Cambridge Associates LLC. All rights reserved.

This report may not be displayed, reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or used to create derivative works in any form, in whole or in portion, by any means, without written permission from Cambridge Associates LLC ("CA"). Copying of this publication is a violation of federal copyright laws ( 17 U.S.C. 101 et seq.). Violators of this copyright may be subject to liability for substantial monetary damages. The information and material published in this report are confidential and non-transferable. This means that authorized members may not disclose any information or material derived from this report to third parties, or use information or material from this report, without prior written authorization. An authorized member may disclose information or material from this report to its staff, trustees, or Investment Committee with the understanding that these individuals will treat it confidentially. Additionally, information from this report may be disclosed if disclosure is required by law or court order, but members are required to provide notice to CA reasonably in advance of such disclosure. This report is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended to constitute an offer of securities of any of the issuers that are described in the report. This report is provided only to persons that CA believes to be "Accredited Investors" as that term is defined in Regulation D under the Securities Act of 1933. When applicable, investors should completely review all Fund offering materials before considering an investment. No part of this report is intended as a recommendation of any firm or any security. Factual information contained herein about investment firms and their returns which has not been independently verified has generally been collected from the firms themselves through the mail. CA can neither assure nor accept responsibility for accuracy, but substantial legal liability may apply to misrepresentations of results delivered through the mail. The CA manager universe statistics, including medians, are derived from CA's proprietary database covering investment managers. These universe statistics and rankings exclude managers that exclude cash from their reported total returns, and for calculations including any years from 1998 to the present, those managers with less than $\$ 50$ million in product assets. Returns for inactive (discontinued) managers are included if performance is available for the entire period measured. Performance results are generally gross of investment management fees. CA does not necessarily endorse or recommend the managers in this universe.

Cambridge Associates LLC is a Massachusetts limited liability company headquartered in Boston, MA with branch offices in Arlington, VA, Dallas, TX and Menlo Park, CA. Cambridge Associates Limited is a Massachusetts limited liability company headquartered in Boston, MA and registered in England and Wales (No. FC022523, Branch No. BR005540). Cambridge Associates Limited also is registered to conduct business in Sydney, Australia (ARBD 109366 654). Cambridge Associates Asia Pte Ltd is a Singapore corporation (Registration No. 200101063G).
$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$

## Why Not Hold Cash?

For investors who believe, as we do, that the current market rally is a cyclical bull within a long-term secular bear, there are a range of defensive strategies one can adopt. ${ }^{1}$ We have advocated several of these, such as overweighting quality assets, diversifying among asset classes that have different economic sources of return, and frequently rebalancing back to policy weights. However, given our secular outlook, plus our assessment that every asset class is either fairly or overvalued, some clients have asked whether we consider it appropriate to explore either a tactical allocation to cash, or some form of hedging strategy involving derivatives.

This is a legitimate question, and for some investors it may make sense to either raise some cash (or take a "go-slow" approach to investing fresh/surplus capital), or to implement a derivatives-based hedge. However, the decision to take such action is complex. Since capital markets performance tends to be highly concentrated in a small handful of big days (both positive and negative), investors are highly unlikely to have perfect timing (Table A). Instead investors must develop a thoughtful game plan and have a strong will to execute this plan. For those choosing to raise cash, they must do the following: (1) develop iron-clad decision rules for market exit and re-entry (ie., rules that trigger selling and re-entry at preset valuation levels); and (2) stick with these rules no matter what (ie., accept the potentially significant opportunity costs of staying out of the market while it is rising, and be able to stomach further losses after buying back into the market should it continue lower). For hedging strategies, decisions are similar in nature, ie., investors should not only have rules for when to implement a given hedge, but also for when to cash it in or roll it over. While taking steps to protect portfolios given today's high valuations makes sense in theory, and while those considering such strategies no doubt believe they will be among the select few who have historically been able to implement such nimble maneuvers, the emerging field of behavioral finance suggests this confidence will be misplaced for the vast majority of investors. ${ }^{2}$ Investors concerned first and foremost with stability of principal (assuming raising cash would not create a large tax liability) may be best able to implement a tactical allocation to cash and/or derivatives-based hedge, given their lessened sensitivity to relative performance and opportunity costs.

## The Opportunity Cost of Holding Cash

The biggest hurdle to successfully implementing a tactical allocation to cash is that of opportunity cost -essentially the lost opportunity for capital gains, dividends, or other income streams that accrue from assets other than cash. To get a rough estimate of the historical magnitude of this opportunity cost, we compared rolling three- and five-year returns on four annually rebalanced hypothetical portfolios (Tables B through E):

[^0](1) Simple, no cash ( $70 \%$ equities, $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds),
(2) Simple, with cash ( $50 \%$ equities, $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds, $20 \%$ cash),
(3) Diversified, no cash, ${ }^{3}$ and
(4) Diversified, with cash (same as \#3, but with $20 \%$ cash drawn pro rata from all asset classes except bonds).

We performed the analysis over three- and five-year horizons, as these are common relatively shortterm performance measurement periods used by most investors. (Of course, we recognize markets may experience mean reversion over a shorter time horizon, reducing the desire to hold some cash, or that extreme valuations could take more than five years to correct.) Further, we used year-end figures rather than choosing high and low points, since investors cannot assume they would get in or out at the optimal time. The $20 \%$ cash figure is also arbitrary, but is intended to represent a sizable "bet" on markets reverting to the mean within the given time frame. Finally, we used simple and diversified portfolios to illustrate the different risk characteristics inherent in each approach. Diversified portfolios are composed of assets less correlated to each other than a straight equity-bond mix, and thus usually provide greater protection in a market downturn. ${ }^{4}$

Not surprisingly, the portfolios with cash underperformed in most three- and five-year periods; as of third quarter 2006, ${ }^{5}$ the cash diversified portfolio has underperformed its no-cash counterpart for 21 of 22 five-year periods, and 22 of 24 three-year periods. Of course, one could argue cash has been a drag over the last quarter century simply because financial assets have enjoyed an unprecedented run of prosperity, due to declining interest rates, strong economic growth, and (often forgotten) low valuations at the beginning of the period. Today, by contrast, inflation and interest rates are ticking higher worldwide, while all asset classes look at the very least fairly valued; thus, cash will not necessarily prove the drag it has been over the past $20+$ years. We certainly have sympathy for this view; indeed, such high and concentrated valuations across asset classes are, as far as we know, unprecedented -even at the peak of previous bubbles, there have always been undervalued asset classes (e.g., real estate, oil and gas, and commodities were undervalued at the peak of the technology bubble in 1999-2000, while small-cap and value equities were dirt cheap relative to largecap and growth stocks). Thus, there is a legitimate case to be made that, while holding cash has been fairly costly over the past few decades, the current environment is materially different than that of the last 25 years.

Going back a bit further, there is one glaring example when holding cash bolstered portfolios significantly -the Great Depression (Tables D and E). Beginning with the five-year period ending in 1931, the simple cash portfolio bested its no-cash counterpart for four periods in a row, with annual outperformance of 200 basis points (bps), $340 \mathrm{bps}, 300 \mathrm{bps}$, and 260 bps , respectively. On a three-year basis, the cash portfolio did even better: for the periods ended 1930-33, the cash portfolio outperformed by annual

[^1]rates of $100 \mathrm{bps}, 630 \mathrm{bps}, 630 \mathrm{bps}$, and 210 bps , respectively. Clearly, this constituted a "best-case" scenario for holding cash, with equity prices falling and consumer prices deflating (i.e., the value of cash was rising). Even so, relative performance quickly shifted, with the no-cash portfolio outperforming in 32 of the next 34 five-year periods, and 32 of 36 three-year periods.

## Timing Issues

While it is possible mid-2007 will prove (in hindsight) to have been a uniquely opportunistic time to sell richly valued assets and raise cash, the chances of getting such a call right are exceedingly small. Further, even if one were somehow able to predict that the next five years would prove difficult for equities, the difficulty of getting the timing right within that time frame presents yet another hurdle. Since 1970, for example, average annual compound returns for the worst decile of five-year returns for the S\&P 500 have fallen between $0.1 \%$ and $-3.8 \%$. However, every one of these periods included a 12 -month return of at least $24.4 \%$; the average best 12 -month period for the worst decile of five-year returns was $38.1 \%$ (Table F ). In other words, secular bears tend to be punctuated by sharp, powerful rallies, even when the primary trend is down. (We also looked at figures for the rest of the developed world, with similar results.)

Further, even those with the best laid plans are likely to find the reality of handling a tactical cash position is significantly more complicated than it seems in theory. For example, an investor might consider it reasonable to sell equities and move to cash when valuations rise to 1 standard deviation above their longterm mean, and buy back in when they fall to 1 standard deviation below their mean. However, an investor who followed this rule for our preferred price-to-earnings ( $\mathrm{P} / \mathrm{E}$ ) measure (which uses real earnings normalized over ten years), would have sold equities in $1992 \ldots$ and still be waiting to get back in. Indeed, even at the nadir of the 2002 bear market, an investor who moved to $20 \%$ cash in 1992 would have failed to catch up with one who simply chose to ride it out (Table G). Even if an investor waited to raise cash until P/E ratios based on 12-month trailing earnings moved 1 standard deviation above their long-term average in 1996, the result would have been similar-the portfolio with cash would have outperformed during the equity market decline, but on a cumulative basis, the portfolio that remained invested would have maintained a higher market value for the full period.

Finally, there are other, more practical considerations. As Jeremy Grantham of Boston money manager GMO recently pointed out, even if you believe, as they do, that "investors are paying for the privilege of taking risk...you could only have a little cash on the margin because the career risk or business risk of moving more would be unsupportable."

## A Hedge by any Other Name...

The simplest methods to implement a derivatives-based hedge are to either scale back equity positions and gain exposure though buying index calls, or buy puts. The primary downside to such positions is the cost, which typically ranges from 200 bps to 300 bps a year, but can vary dramatically due to changes in implied volatility. In late February-early March, for example, the cost to implement a standard hedge (buying 12-month, $10 \%$ out-of-the-money put options) jumped by roughly 60 bps in a matter of days.

To further illustrate this cost, we created a simplified position (Table G) that shows the return impact for an investor who purchased 12-month, $10 \%$ out-of-the-money puts when real normalized $\mathrm{P} /$ Es rose to more than 1 standard deviation above their long-term mean in 1992, then rolled the position forward each year. We assumed a very conservative 200-bp-a-year drag on the equity portion of the portfolio (while this is roughly what such puts cost now, it was much higher for most of the period), and "credited" the investor with gains in years when the S\&P 500 posted a return worse than $-10 \%$ (this only occurred in 2001, when the index returned $-12 \%$, and 2002 , when it returned $-22 \%$ ). As shown in the table, this approach would have been less costly than holding $20 \%$ in cash (again, we used very conservative assumptions ${ }^{6}$ ), but still lagged the no-cash portfolios by a wide margin.
"Cashless collars" are essentially a method for avoiding this cost, with proceeds from the sale of out-of-the-money call options used to fund the purchase of out-of-the-money puts. In a standard example, an investor sells $10 \%$ out-of-the-money calls and spends the proceeds on $10 \%$ out-of-the-money puts. Thus, the value of the investor's portfolio is protected after the market falls by $10 \%$ within the given time frame (ie., the maximum downside for the portfolio is $10 \%$ ); however, if the market appreciates during this period, any upside beyond a $10 \%$ increase will be forfeited (Table H). ${ }^{7}$ While many investors are attracted to cashless collars because they are self-funding in terms of the premium payment, there are other issues to consider. Collars not only place a cap on upside potential, but also introduce more complexity into the portfolio, as investors may be required to post collateral if the market rises above the strike price of the calls. Thus, investors looking to hedge against a steep decline should be wary of creating a collar (rather than just buying puts) simply because it is self-funding.

Another way to offset some of the cost of puts is to sell puts that are further out of the money. In other words, in exchange for a reduced premium, an investor can adopt a strategy where the portfolio is protected for a range of declines (say $10 \%$ to $25 \%$ ), but is exposed in the event the market declines by more than the outer band of the collar. Indeed, while history is an imperfect guide to "fat tails," what data we do have suggest investors are unlikely to need protection that goes beyond declines of $20 \%$ to $25 \%$ (Table I). As shown in the table, six-month declines of more than $20 \%$ have been quite rare in the United States, although they have been slightly more common in the United Kingdom, with a number occurring during the horrendous bear market of 1973-74. We believe the six-month time frame is the most applicable for most investors, as most investors choose to buy 12 -month options, and it is unreasonable to assume, first, that the decline will begin immediately after purchase, and second, that the investor will hold the option to expiration. Thus, as a general rule, for those looking to mitigate the cost of buying put options, we would recommend selling further out-of-the-money puts (with a strike price, say, $25 \%$ lower than current levels) rather than selling calls. ${ }^{8}$ However, it is important to understand that selling out-of-the-money puts also caps protection from a severe downturn. Thus, in a true "black swan"-type event (ie., a severe and sustained market crash), an investor that used this strategy would accrue losses on both sides of the collar. To use a

[^2]simple example, if the market declined by $35 \%$, someone who used a $10-\mathrm{bp}$ to $25-\mathrm{bp}$ spread would incur a loss of $20 \%-10 \%$ before the collar kicked in, and another $10 \%$ on the puts sold. Indeed, this issue is illustrative of our main point: namely, investors must be very clear exactly what it is they are hedging against, and structure positions appropriately. (Easier said than done, of course!)

## Conclusion

We recognize that at first glance, our advice to stick to policy targets (and not hold cash) seems somewhat incongruous with our opinion that most major asset classes are overvalued. However, investors who choose to hold cash must stick to their entry and exit strategies; otherwise, they risk incurring lots of opportunity cost, only to lose patience with the strategy and buy back into markets before they correct, locking in relative underperformance and eliminating any downside protection. In other words, such an investor would not only miss out on the upside, but also be fully exposed to future market declines. Using options to hedge against a market decline, meanwhile, not only entails making subsequent decisions about whether or not to maintain protection, but also introduces new complexity into the portfolio, and may require significant monitoring depending on the strategy used. Thus, for most investors, we believe the more prudent course is to ride out any market volatility, while reducing portfolio risk by significantly increasing exposure to quality within equities, maintaining a diversified portfolio with adequate exposure to fixed income and inflation-hedging assets in the event of macroeconomic shocks, and rebalancing frequently to take advantage of market fluctuations. To be clear: we believe valuations are unusually high across asset classes, and investor risk appetite is at unsustainably high (and potentially dangerous) levels. However, given the complexities of either holding cash or implementing a derivatives-based hedge, and the uncertainties about the timing (and duration) of a potential market decline, we do not believe it makes sense for most investors to pursue such strategies.

For those for whom stability of principal is the primary objective, or who are convinced a steep setback is imminent, we would recommend holding either cash or some form of out-of-the-money puts. While cash may seem the simpler of the choices, options are likely preferable for investors concerned with potential tax liabilities, as well as those who would like to maintain their current manager structure longer term. While taxable investors are more apt to be concerned with stability of principal, the taxes incurred by raising cash may push the cost of such a strategy to unacceptable levels. In these cases, derivatives-based strategies ${ }^{9}$ may represent the most cost-effective method of maintaining stability, despite the potential upfront costs.

[^3]Table A
MARKET TIMING - MISSING THE BEST DAYS
Much of the return from equities is concentrated in very short time horizons. Returns on common stocks can be sharply cut if an investor misses only a handful of days or months.

A daily examination of the market from 1980 through 2006 dramatizes how a small error in timing can be costly. The horizon in this chart is the 7,044 trading days from January 1, 1980 through December 31, 2006.

Compound Returns (\%)
January 1, 1980 - December 31, 2006


The data lead to the same conclusion when viewed over longer time periods.


## Table A (continued)

## MARKET TIMING - MISSING THE WORST DAYS

Returns on common equities can be increased dramatically if an investor misses only a handful of days or months. Again, the horizon for this chart is the 7,044 trading days from January 1, 1980 through December 31, 2006.

## Compound Returns (\%) <br> January 1, 1980 - December 31, 2006



The data lead to the same conclusion when viewed over longer time periods.


Sources: Standard \& Poor's and Thomson Datastream.
$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$
CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATES LLD

Table B (continued)
FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE ANNUAL COMPOUND RETURN COMPARISON OF PORTFOLIOS March 31, 1970 - September 30, 2006
Diversified Portfolio Comparison

Diversified - Cash Database, Citigroup Global Markets, Dow Jones \& Company, Inc., Federal Reserve, FTSE International Limited, Goldman, Sachs \& Co., J.P. Morgan Securities, Inc., Estate vestment Fiduciaries, Prudental Real Estate Investors, Standard \& Poor's, Standard and Poor's Emerging Markets Database, Thomson Datastream, and Wilshire Associates, Inc. MSCI data provided "as is" without any expressed or implied warranties.
Notes: Data for 2006 are through September 30. The simple portfolio consists of $70 \%$ U.S. equity and $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds. The simple portfolio including cash consists of $50 \%$ U.S. equity, $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds, and $20 \%$ cash. The diversified portfolio is the average portfolio for clients with more than $\$ 1$ billion in investable assets.
$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$
CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATES LC


C A
Table C (continued)
THREE-YEAR AVERAGE ANNUAL COMPOUND RETURN COMPARISON OF PORTFOLIOS
March 31, 1970 - September 30, 2006
Diversified Portfolio Comparison

Diversified - Cash
Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Cambridge Associates LLC Investment Manager Database, Cambridge Associates LLC Non-Marketable Alternative Assets Database, Citigroup Global Markets, Dow Jones \& Company, Inc., Federal Reserve, FTSE International Limited, Goldman, Sachs \& Co., J.P. Morgan Securities, Inc., Lehman Brothers, Inc., Merrill Lynch \& Co., Morgan Stanley Capital International, National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts, National Council of Real Estate Investment Fiduciaries, Prudental Real Estate Investors, Standard \& Poor's, Standard and Poor's Emerging Markets Database, Thomson Datastream, and Wilshire Associates, Inc. MSCI data provided "as is" without any expressed or implied warranties.
Notes: Data for 2006 are through September 30. The simple portfolio consists of $70 \%$ U.S. equity and $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds. The simple portfolio including cash consists of $50 \%$ U.S. equity, $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds, and $20 \%$ cash. The diversified portfolio is the average portfolio for clients with more than $\$ 1$ billion in investable assets.
$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$
Table D
FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE ANNUAL COMPOUND RETURN COMPARISON OF SIMPLE PORTFOLIO
March 31, 1926 - December 31, 1950

(\%) umpoy
 $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds, and $20 \%$ cash.
$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$
Table E
THREE-YEAR AVERAGE ANNUAL COMPOUND RETURN COMPARISON OF SIMPLE PORTFOLIO
 $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds, and $20 \%$ cash.
$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$
Table F

Sources: Morgan Stanley Capital International, Standard and Poor's, and Thomson Datastream. MSCI data provided "as is" without any expressed or implied warranties.

## Table G

## CUMULATIVE WEALTH COMPARISON OF VARIOUS PORTFOLIOS

January 1, 1992 - September 30, 2006


Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Cambridge Associates LLC Investment Manager Database, Cambridge Associates LLC Non-Marketable Alternative Assets Database, Citigroup Global Markets, Dow Jones \& Company, Inc., Federal Reserve, FTSE International Limited, Goldman, Sachs \& Co., J.P. Morgan Securities, Inc., Lehman Brothers, Inc., Merrill Lynch \& Co., Morgan Stanley Capital International, National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts, National Council of Real Estate Investment Fiduciaries, Prudential Real Estate Investors, Standard \& Poor's, Standard and Poor's Emerging Markets Database, Thomson Datastream, and Wilshire Associates, Inc. MSCI data provided "as is" without any expressed or implied warranties.

Notes: The simple portfolio consists of $70 \%$ U.S. equity and $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds. The simple portfolio including cash consists of $50 \%$ U.S. equity, $30 \%$ high-quality corporate bonds, and $20 \%$ cash. The diversified portfolio is the average portfolio for clients with more than $\$ 1$ billion in investable assets. No cash with drag assumes 200 basis point yearly drag from an annually rolled 12 -month, $10 \%$ out-of-the-money put option on the public equity portion of the portfolio.

## Table H

## COST/BENEFIT OF VARIOUS OPTIONS STRATEGIES



Notes: Collar assumes purchase of 5\% out-of-the-money put and 5\% out-of-the-money call. Put spread represents purchase of $5 \%$ out-of-the-money put, sale of $20 \%$ out-of-the-money put, and sale of $7.7 \%$ out-of-the-money call. Levered put spread shows purchase of $10 \%$ out-of-the-money put levered two times, sale of $15 \%$ out-of-themoney put, and sale of $8.7 \%$ out-of-the-money call. All strategies use 12-month options, and all caculations exclude dividends.
$C \mid A$

## Table I

S\&P 500 INDEX FULL PERIOD DRAWDOWNS (\%)

$\mathrm{C} \mid \mathrm{A}$
CAMBRIDGE ASSOCIATES LC



Sources: Standard and Poor's, FTSE International Limited, and Thomson Datastream.
Note: Data for 2007 through February 28.


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ We have articulated these views in a series of papers on the evolution of the secular bear market in equities and our thoughts on how investors can best cope with the prevailing uncertainties. These papers are grouped together in the research section of our website under "Asset Allocation in the Current Environment."
    ${ }^{2}$ For more details on overconfidence bias and other related topics, please see our 2000 report Behavioral Finance.

[^1]:    ${ }^{3}$ The diversified portfolio is the average portfolio allocation (excluding cash) for clients with more than $\$ 1$ billion in investable assets as of December 31, 2006: $47.9 \%$ equities, $12.7 \%$ bonds, $5.3 \%$ real estate (private and RETs), $21.3 \%$ hedge funds, and $12.8 \%$ alternatives (venture capital, private equity, oil and gas, timber, commodities, and other inflation-hedging assets). However, we have backfilled returns for many asset classes (such as hedge funds, private equity, and venture capital) with public equity market returns due to a lack of reliable data generally prior to 1980 . Thus, during the 1970s the diversified portfolio looks a lot like the simple portfolio.
    ${ }^{4}$ The one exception to this rule has been during extreme, crisis-type events (such as the selloff sparked by the Russian debt default in August 1998), when correlations among all asset classes (except "safe havens" such as U.S. Treasuries and gold) have generally moved toward one.
    ${ }^{5}$ The most recent data available for non-marketable assets; all other periods end at year end.

[^2]:    ${ }^{6}$ For returns to be the same as the portfolios with $20 \%$ cash, the annual cost of the options would have needed to be roughly 290 bps for the simple portfolio, and about 440 bps for the diversified portfolio.
    ${ }^{7}$ Investors may also be required to post collateral if the market rises above the strike price of the calls, with requirements for individuals likely to be more onerous than those for institutions.
    ${ }^{8}$ For those interested in a slightly more complex trade, it is generally possible to buy $10 \%$ out-of-the-money puts and sell $15 \%$ out-of-the-money puts, leveraged three times, for slightly more than it would cost to do the same trade (unleveraged) selling $25 \%$ out-of-the-money puts. Thus, the maximum upside is $15 \%$ (the same as with the 10 -bp to 25 bp spread), but this would be achieved with a market decline of $15 \%$, rather than $25 \%$. As of mid-May, the difference in cost between the two strategies was about 30 bps .

[^3]:    ${ }^{9}$ While our analysis has focused on options, investors can also use futures to hedge against a market decline; indeed, they may be more efficient for taxable investors. Detailed discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this paperinterested parties should discuss with their tax advisors.

