# Polen Focus Growth

Portfolio Manager Commentary – December 2020

#### Summary

- During the fourth quarter of 2020, the Polen Focus Growth Composite Portfolio (the "Portfolio") returned 10.15% gross of fees versus 11.39% for the Russell 1000 Growth Index (the "Index") and 12.15% for the S&P 500. For the full year 2020, the Portfolio returned 34.65% gross of fees versus 38.49% for the Index and 18.40% for the S&P 500.
- The prospect of COVID-19 vaccine approvals and distribution led to a rise in Treasury rates during the quarter and a rotation toward pro-cyclical equities. The energy, financials, industrials, and materials sectors delivered the highest returns in the Index for the quarter. We have almost zero exposure to these sectors as generally very few companies within them pass our investment guardrails.
- Over the past year, we calculate that our Portfolio's earnings per share has grown over 10%, which we

view as quite resilient considering the weakness of the U.S. and global economies. The Russell 1000 Growth Index has seen earnings decline 8%, and the S&P 500 Index has seen earnings decline over 17%. In 2021, we expect our earnings per share growth to be above our historical mid-teens rate.

- We continued to observe ebullient behavior in the U.S. equity market, with some company stock prices increasing on non-economic news and nearly 250 special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) IPOs in 2020. We also calculate that just Apple, Amazon, and Tesla together accounted for nearly 40% of the Russell 1000 Growth's return in 2020.
- We made one trade in the fourth quarter, adding a new position in Illumina to the Portfolio.



Seeks Growth & Capital Preservation (Performance (%) as of 12-31-2020)

The performance data quoted represents past performance and does not guarantee future results. Current performance may be lower or higher. Periods over one-year are annualized. Please reference the supplemental information to the composite performance which accompanies this commentary.

The commentary is not intended as a guarantee of profitable outcomes. Any forward-looking statements are based on certain expectations and assumptions that are susceptible to changes in circumstances.



#### Commentary

During the fourth quarter of 2020, the Polen Focus Growth Composite Portfolio (the "Portfolio") returned 10.15% gross of fees versus 11.39% for the Russell 1000 Growth Index (the "Index") and 12.15% for the S&P 500. For the full year 2020, the Portfolio returned 34.65% gross of fees versus 38.49% for the Index and 18.40% for the S&P 500.

The prospect of COVID-19 vaccine approvals and distribution led to a rise in Treasury rates in the quarter and a rotation toward procyclical equities. The energy, financials, industrials, and materials sectors delivered the highest returns in the Index for the guarter. We have almost zero exposure to these sectors as generally very few companies within them pass all five of our investment guardrails-strong balance sheet, sustained 20%+ return on equity, stable or growing margins, abundant free cash flow, and real organic revenue growth. In the short run, opinions on stimulus, GDP growth, interest rates, and many other factors can greatly influence what leads and lags in the stock market. But, over the longer-term, we believe returns are far more influenced by earnings growth and dividends. We remain optimistic about the Focus Growth strategy's potential to deliver strong returns in the years to come due to the resilient and consistent earnings growth demonstrated by the companies we own.

This resiliency was on display in our Portfolio in 2020.

Over the past year, we calculate that our Portfolio's overall earnings per share has grown over 10%, which is quite resilient considering the weakness of the U.S. and global economies.

Meanwhile, the Russell 1000 Growth Index has seen earnings decline 8% and the S&P 500 Index has seen earnings decline over 17%! In 2021, we expect our earnings per share growth to be above our historical mid-teens rate.

#### An Apple a Day Keeps the Doctor Away, but a SPAC a Day Gives the Conservative Investor Heartburn

We continued to observe ebullient behavior in the U.S. equity market with some company stock prices increasing on noneconomic news (stock splits), triple-digit percentage gains in one day on IPOs of already large capitalization companies (e.g., Airbnb and Snowflake), and nearly 250 special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) IPOs in 2020.

Per the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), a blank check company or Special Purchase Acquisition Company (SPAC) is a "development stage company that has no specific business plan or purpose or has indicated its business plan is to engage in a merger or acquisition with an unidentified company or companies, other entity, or person. These companies typically involve speculative investments and often fall within the SEC's definition of penny stocks or are considered microcap stocks." SPACs are an easy way for a company to go public and deploy the cash into acquisitions. Thus far, very few have become successful businesses.

The number of SPACs that go public in any given year can sometimes be used as a barometer for the risk tolerance of market participants. In 2020, 248 SPACs went public, raising over \$83 billion in capital. To put that into context, that is 1) nearly one for every trading day in the U.S., 2) more than in the previous 10 years combined, and 3) more than four times the last peak in 2007! Extremely low interest rates and human behavior are clearly having an inflationary effect on the capital markets. And, we are being very careful to remain true to our investment discipline of only investing in what we think are the most financially superior, competitively advantaged companies we can find and nothing less. We are also constantly monitoring the valuations of our holdings to make sure we have clear line of sight to double-digit annualized returns on each company. If need be, we will sell companies where the valuations are no longer attractive and seek alternatives.

Also in 2020, just three companies were responsible for 40% (approximately 1,500 basis points) of the Russell 1000 Growth's 38.6% return: Apple, Amazon, and Tesla. Together, they have a combined market cap of \$4.5 trillion. We do not own any of these companies today (we have owned Apple and Amazon in the past), and they currently account for approximately 22% of the Russell 1000 Growth's weighting, collectively. To be clear, we believe these three companies are very competitively advantaged businesses, but we do not own them for company-specific reasons.

We believe Apple's revenue growth for its existing offerings over the long-term is unlikely to surpass mid-single-digit annualized growth. Therefore, we continue to believe we have better investment opportunities today, particularly considering Apple's lofty valuation for this level of expected growth. We think Amazon is a fantastic business that now meets our investment guardrails-many years of investment had kept Amazon's free cash flow, margins, and returns below our requirements. However, we felt there were a wider range of possibilities for Amazon's earnings growth during the next five years and that the valuation was a little higher than we'd like. That said, we acknowledge that the shift online is supportive of the growth in each of its businesses. Tesla has not yet met our guardrail for returns on equity due to the capital intensity of its businesses. Although, in fairness to the company, Tesla has a path to meeting our guardrails given the success of its core electric vehicle business. Beyond our guardrails, Tesla's valuation and capital allocation practices also raise questions for us, currently.



As a concentrated growth manager, we are looking to find approximately 20 tremendously strong growth companies that we believe can, in aggregate, deliver mid-teens or better earnings growth and, thus similar investment returns over the long haul if we continue to invest in these businesses at reasonable prices. We consistently find companies that meet our high hurdles and do not need to lower our quality criteria and stretch our discipline to do so. We also do not feel compelled to own any particular company based on its weighting in a benchmark.

### Instead, we let our business-focused research guide our investment decisions, armed with our belief that business performance drives share prices over the long-term rather than benchmark weights or other non-fundamental factors.

For the Portfolio in 2020, two companies appreciated over 100%, **PayPal** and **Autodesk**, and four others returned more than 50% each—**ServiceNow** (95%); **Align Technology** (92%); **MSCI** (74%); and **Adobe** (52%). All these companies meet our guardrails handily, and they account for approximately 25% of our Portfolio in aggregate today. Yet, none of them account for more than 1.5% of the Russell 1000 Growth Index individually. We think the Portfolio's ability to deliver a 34.65% annual return versus the Index's return of 38.49%, which was largely driven by three companies we did not own, demonstrates that several other great investments exist, ones that both meet our guardrails and have valuations that, to us, more comfortably supports attractive returns.

#### **Portfolio Activity**

We made just one trade in the fourth quarter, initiating a new position in **Illumina**. The company manufactures DNA-sequencing equipment and the consumables for this equipment, which enable DNA to be sequenced in a timely, accurate, and affordable way. More simply, we view Illumina as the leading operating system for DNA sequencing. Mapping human DNA in an accurate, timely, and affordable manner is difficult. DNA sequencing is also important for early diagnosis and targeted treatment of many diseases. Illumina has over 70% market share of its long-term \$20 billion+ sequencing market due to its leading technology platform that is difficult to replicate, the trust it has built with customers, and its sticky systems that customers are reluctant to replace.

We often say that it can take years for a company to make its way through our investment process and into the Portfolio, and Illumina is a great example of this. We studied Illumina for six years prior to investing. The biggest hurdle has been valuation over most of this period. We felt there was an opportunity to invest shortly after Illumina announced an \$8 billion acquisition of Grail, a company that was founded inside of Illumina and later spun out. Grail has developed a unique blood test to diagnose more than 50 life threatening cancers at an early stage so they can be treated earlier and with far less mortality. Illumina's stock dropped significantly following the Grail announcement because it is a sizeable acquisition that will bring down Illumina's margins in the short-term. We viewed this as an opportunity because we do not believe Grail negatively impacts Illumina's core sequencing business going forward. In fact, we believe Grail has a large opportunity to become a differentiated and leading early-stage cancer testing company that may be better positioned to realize this opportunity as part of Illumina.

We believe Illumina exercised sound judgment in both spinning Grail out four years ago and then moving to acquire the business today. While Grail will lower Illumina's margins and return on equity meaningfully in the short-term, we remain focused on Illumina's core sequencing business and the company's long-term earnings power. We do not believe Grail would negatively impact the economics of Illumina's core business even in a scenario where Grail fails to execute on the large opportunity in front of it. And, of course, if Grail can continue executing on its vision to become the leader in early-stage cancer testing, Illumina's business and sequencing platform could become even larger and stronger.

## **Portfolio Performance & Attribution**

Our top performers (Portfolio average weight multiplied by return) in the fourth quarter were **Alphabet**, **Align Technology**, and **Autodesk**. The bottom contributors during the quarter were **Salesforce.com**, **Regeneron Pharmaceuticals**, and **Zoetis**.

#### We discussed both ${\bf Sales force.com}$ and ${\bf Regeneron}$

**Pharmaceuticals** in the <u>third quarter</u>, but the former went from our top contributor last quarter to the largest detractor this quarter. The double-digit share price decline in the quarter seemed mostly driven by investor reaction after Salesforce announced it would acquire Slack, a collaboration software company, for approximately \$28 billion, a high purchase price. While the purchase price is higher than we expected, we believe Slack and its functionality fit well strategically with Salesforce's suite of enterprise software offerings. At a high-level, Slack offers the ability to make both Salesforce's and other third-party applications work better for their respective customers. In addition, Salesforce's world-class selling organization and already large customer base should be beneficial for Slack's subscription revenue growth, which has been more customer-referral based up to this point. It is too early to know if this acquisition will prove to be a smart allocation of investor capital. That said, Slack has a unique value proposition and was growing nicely on a standalone basis. We believe the Salesforce-Slack strategic vision is on point; and although the purchase price is high in absolute dollars, it represents less than 15% of Salesforce's market capitalization.



We maintain an optimistic view of Salesforce's business, its competitive positioning within enterprise software, and the rationale behind the Slack acquisition. We expect strong, continued earnings and free cash flow growth many years into the future.

For the full year 2020, the top performers were **Microsoft**, **PayPal**, and **Adobe**. The bottom contributors were **O'Reilly Automotive**, **Booking Holdings**, and **ADP**.

For **Microsoft**, **PayPal**, and **Adobe**, we have discussed each company at different times throughout the year. Microsoft and Adobe, which we have owned for many years, continue to benefit from being the gold standards of software in their respective areas, and the current environment has only served to accelerate customer demand and need for their products and services. For PayPal, which we purchased in 2019, the company continues to take market share in digital payments and has seen an acceleration in user adoption and engagement, especially within their "silver tech" or older user demographic. We expect many more years of ongoing double-digit growth from their various business segments and new initiatives.

For the top detractors, **O'Reilly Automotive** and **Booking Holdings** were each sold in the first quarter 2020. Both companies' earnings growth rates were already being closely monitored prior to COVID-19, and both made up smaller weightings in the Portfolio before the time of sale. The onset of COVID-19 and subsequent shelter-in-place orders, among other existing factors, changed our investment cases for these businesses. For **ADP**, we detail our decision to sell our position in the third quarter letter. In summary, the very high levels of unemployment in the U.S. and extremely low interest rates have negatively impacted the business in the short term. At the same time, increasing competitive intensity in the human capital management industry is creating headwinds.

#### Outlook

2020 was certainly a surprising year in many respects, but when we look back at how our companies performed fundamentally, we see indicators of their strength and ability to effectively weather unexpected 100-year storms. We also believe and are excited that the Portfolio exited the year with an even better growth and quality profile than it had at that start of 2020, based on the balance sheets, earnings potential, and potential growth runways of the companies we added to the Portfolio. All four companies we purchased, based on our research, are clear leaders within their respective industries, and three of the four, Intuitive Surgical, Illumina and Autodesk, have commanding market share in their respective industries.

## Team Update

We are pleased to announce that Rana Pritanjali has joined the Polen Capital Large Company Growth team as a Research Analyst. With her addition, the Large Company Growth team grows to 11 members.

Rana brings a wealth of knowledge and diverse experience to the Large Company Growth team. Before joining Polen Capital, Rana worked as a research analyst for Causeway Capital, The Motley Fool, and Credit Suisse in Singapore. She was also a junior partner at Arkanis Capital, a boutique wealth management firm in India. Rana was born and raised in India, where she also received her B.S. in civil engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. She received her M.B.A. from Columbia Business School.

While we are well resourced, we also believe it's important to be receptive to evaluating talent. Rana's hire was an opportunistic one. We have had the pleasure of getting to know Rana over the last few years through various professional connections. After an exhaustive interview process in 2020, it became clear that she was a strong cultural fit and extremely well aligned to the Polen Capital investment philosophy. We look forward to Rana's contributions to the team and to our clients.

Thank you for your interest in Polen Capital and the Focus Growth strategy. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments. We wish everyone a happy and healthy new year.

Sincerely,

Dan Davidowitz & Brandon Ladoff

#### **Experience in High Quality Growth Investing**



**Dan Davidowitz, CFA** Portfolio Manager & Analyst 22 years of experience



**Brandon Ladoff** Portfolio Manager & Director of Research 8 years of experience



#### **Historical Performance**

	Polen (Gross) (%)	Polen (Net) (%)	R1000G (%)	S&P 500 (%)
3 Months	10.15	10.01	11.39	12.15
YTD	34.65	34.00	38.49	18.40
1 Year	34.65	34.00	38.49	18.40
3 Years	26.76	26.17	22.99	14.18
5 Years	21.49	20.92	21.01	15.22
7 Years	20.11	19.52	17.54	12.92
10 Years	18.53	17.90	17.21	13.89
15 Years	15.00	14.26	12.54	9.88
20 Years	11.75	10.96	8.27	7.47
25 Years	13.96	13.08	10.18	9.56
30 Years	15.24	14.28	11.21	10.70
Since Inception (01-01-1989)	15.64	14.65	11.53	10.84

Returns are trailing through 12-31-2020. Annualized returns are presented for periods greater than one-year. Source: Archer.



## **GIPS** Report

#### **Polen Capital Management**

Large Capitalization Equity Composite—Annual Disclosure Presentation

		UMA	Firm	Composit	Composite Assets Annual Performance Results						3 Year Standard Deviation			
Year End	Total (\$Millions)	Assets (\$Millions)	Assets (\$Millions)	U.S. Dollars (\$Millions)	Number of Accounts	Composite Gross (%)	Composite Net (%)	S&P 500 (%)	Russell 1000 G (%)	Composite Dispersion (%)	Composite Gross (%)	S&P 500 (%)	Russell 1000 G (%)	
2019	34,784	12,681	22,104	8,831	939	38.80	38.16	31.49	36.40	0.3	12.13	11.93	13.07	
2018	20,591	7,862	12,729	6,146	705	8.98	8.47	-4.38	-1.51	0.2	11.90	10.95	12.30	
2017	17,422	6,957	10,466	5,310	513	27.74	27.14	21.83	30.22	0.4	10.66	10.07	10.69	
2016	11,251	4,697	6,554	3,212	426	1.72	1.22	11.96	7.09	0.2	11.31	10.74	11.31	
2015	7,451	2,125	5,326	2,239	321	15.89	15.27	1.38	5.68	0.1	10.92	10.62	10.85	
2014	5,328	1,335	3,993	1,990	237	17.60	16.95	13.69	13.06	0.2	10.66	9.10	9.73	
2013	5,015	1,197	3,818	1,834	245	23.77	23.07	32.39	33.49	0.3	11.91	12.11	12.35	
2012	4,527	889	3,638	1,495	325	12.43	11.75	16.00	15.26	0.1	16.01	15.30	15.88	
2011	2,374	561	1,812	555	171	9.04	8.25	2.12	2.63	0.2	15.98	18.97	18.01	
2010	1,181	322	860	316	120	15.65	14.70	15.06	16.72	0.2	20.16	22.16	22.42	
2009	626	131	494	225	120	39.71	38.50	26.45	37.21	0.3	16.99	19.91	20.01	
2008	266	10	256	137	112	-27.81	-28.42	-37.01	-38.44	0.3	15.26	15.29	16.63	
2007	682	_	682	491	149	10.78	9.86	5.49	11.81	0.2	8.36	7.79	8.66	
2006	730	-	730	524	219	15.00	14.04	15.80	9.07	0.1	7.25	6.92	8.43	
2005	1,849	-	1,849	945	419	-0.53	-1.43	4.91	5.26	0.2	8.08	9.17	9.67	
2004	2,017	-	2,017	1,124	665	8.72	7.76	10.88	6.30	0.2	10.08	15.07	15.66	
2003	1,617	-	1,617	907	513	17.73	16.67	28.68	29.75	0.7	12.98	18.32	22.98	
2002	970	_	970	518	407	-6.69	-7.53	-22.10	-27.88	0.9	13.15	18.81	25.58	
2001	703	-	703	408	289	-4.61	-5.50	-11.89	-20.42	1.0	13.58	16.94	25.56	
2000	622	-	622	359	236	-3.50	-4.44	-9.10	-22.42	0.7	16.52	17.67	23.11	
1999	640	-	640	377	228	23.89	22.65	21.04	33.16	0.6	18.27	16.76	19.27	
1998	418	-	418	257	202	31.61	30.19	28.58	38.71	0.7	17.95	16.23	18.15	
1997	252	_	252	145	158	37.14	35.63	33.36	30.49	0.9	13.17	11.30	12.79	
1996	140	_	140	89	118	31.94	30.40	22.96	23.12	0.7	10.61	9.72	10.49	
1995	70	-	70	45	61	48.07	46.33	37.58	37.18	1.0	9.72	8.34	9.26	
1994	32	-	32	17	27	10.13	8.96	1.32	2.62	1.6	-	-	-	
1993	24	-	24	16	26	13.07	11.85	10.08	2.87	2.9	-	-	-	
1992	16	-	16	11	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

Total assets and UMA assets are supplemental information to the Annual Disclosure Presentation.

While pitch books are updated quarterly to include composite performance through the most recent quarter, we use the GIPS Report that includes annual returns only. To minimize the risk of error we update the GIPS Report annually. This is typically updated by the end of the first quarter.



#### **GIPS** Disclosure

The Large Capitalization Equity Composite created on January 1, 2006 with inception date April 1, 1992 contains fully discretionary large cap equity accounts that are not managed within a wrap fee structure and for comparison purposes is measured against the S&P 500 and the Russell 1000 Growth indices. The accounts are highly concentrated and unconstrained with regard to the number of the highest-conviction positions (i.e., positions of greater than 5%) comprising the portfolios. Polen Capital invests exclusively in a portfolio of high-quality companies.

Polen Capital Management claims compliance with the Global Investment Performance Standards (GIPS®) and has prepared and presented this report in compliance with the GIPS standards. Polen Capital Management has been independently verified for the periods April 1, 1992 through June 30, 2020. A firm that claims compliance with the GIPS standards must establish policies and procedures for complying with all the applicable requirements of the GIPS standards.

Verification provides assurance on whether the firm's policies and procedures related to composite and pooled fund maintenance, as well as the calculation, presentation, and distribution of performance, have been designed in compliance with the GIPS standards and have been implemented on a firm-wide basis. The Large Capitalization Equity Composite has had a performance examination for the periods April 1, 1992 through June 30, 2020. The verification and performance examination reports are available upon request.

Polen Capital Management is an independent registered investment adviser. A list of all composite and pooled fund investment strategies offered by the firm, with a description of each strategy, is available upon request. In July 2007, the firm was reorganized from an S-corporation into an LLC and changed names from Polen Capital Management, Inc. to Polen Capital Management, LLC.

Results are based on fully discretionary accounts under management, including those accounts no longer with the firm. From July 1, 2002 through April 30, 2016, composite policy required the temporary removal of any portfolio incurring a client initiated significant cash outflow of 10% or greater of portfolio assets. The temporary removal of such an account occurred at the beginning of the month in which the significant cash flow occurred and the account reentered the composite the first full month after the cash flow. The U.S. Dollar is the currency used to express performance. Returns are presented gross and net of management fees and include the reinvestment of all income. Net of fee performance was calculated using actual management fees. The annual composite dispersion presented is an asset-weighted standard deviation using returns presented gross of management fees calculated for the accounts in the composite the entire year. Policies for valuing portfolios, calculating performance, and preparing GIPS Reports are available upon request.

#### The management fee schedule is as follows:

Institutional: Per annum fees for managing accounts are 75 basis points (.75%) on the first \$50 Million and 55 basis points (.55%) on all assets above \$50 Million of assets under management. HNW: Per annum fees for managing accounts are 150 basis points (1.5%) of the first \$500,000 of assets under

management and 100 basis points (1.0%) of amounts above \$500,000 of assets under management. Actual investment advisory fees incurred by clients may vary.

Past performance does not guarantee future results and future accuracy and profitable results cannot be guaranteed. Performance figures are presented gross and net of management fees and have been calculated after the deduction of all transaction costs and commissions. Polen Capital is an SEC registered investment advisor and its investment advisory fees are described in its Form ADV Part 2A. The advisory fees will reduce clients' returns. The chart below depicts the effect of a 1% management fee on the growth of one dollar over a 10 year period at 10% (9% after fees) and 20% (19% after fees) assumed rates of return.

The S&P 500° Index is a widely recognized, unmanaged index of 500 common stocks which are generally representative of the U.S. stock market as a whole. The Russell 1000° Growth Index is an unmanaged index that measures the performance of the large-cap growth segment of the U.S. equity universe. It includes those Russell 1000° Index companies with higher price-to-book ratios and higher forecasted growth values.

The volatility and other material characteristics of the indices referenced may be materially different from the performance achieved. In addition, the composite's holdings may be materially different from those within the index. Indices are unmanaged and one cannot invest directly in an index.

The information provided in this document should not be construed as a recommendation to purchase or sell any particular security. There is no assurance that any securities discussed herein will remain in the composite or that the securities sold will not be repurchased. The securities discussed do not represent the composites' entire portfolio. Actual holdings will vary depending on the size of the account, cash flows, and restrictions. It should not be assumed that any of the securities transactions or holdings discussed will prove to be profitable, or that the investment recommendations or decisions we make in the future will be profitable or will equal the investment performance of the securities discussed herein. A complete list of our past specific recommendations for the last year is available upon request.

Return	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years	7 Years	8 Years	9 Years	10 Years
10%	1.10	1.21	1.33	1.46	1.61	1.77	1.95	2.14	2.36	2.59
9%	1.09	1.19	1.30	1.41	1.54	1.68	1.83	1.99	2.17	2.37
20%	1.20	1.44	1.73	2.07	2.49	2.99	3.58	4.30	5.16	6.19
19%	1.19	1.42	1.69	2.01	2.39	2.84	3.38	4.02	4.79	5.69

