


BUSINESS: Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. owns the world's largest retail chain, operating 3,522 supercenters (includes grocery departments), 415 discount stores, 660 Sam's Clubs, and 735 Neighborhood Markets in the U.S., plus 6,363 foreign stores, many in Latin America, with the rest in Asia, Canada, and the U.K. as of $1 / 31 / 17$. Total store space: 1.164 billion square feet. Retail space is largely
Wal-Mart continues to report encouraging top-line results. Revenue advanced 1\% year over year in the J anuary quarter, and $3 \%$ on a constant-currency basis. Domestic same-store sales increased $1.8 \%$ on a $1.4 \%$ rise in traffic, the ninthconsecutive quarter with a higher number of transactions. It appears customers are responding well to cleaner stores, friendlier service, better inventory availability, and faster check-out times enabled by new technology and associate training programs. Comps may have slowed in the April quarter, though, due to a delay in tax refunds compared to last year. WalMart expects domestic comps to land between $1.0 \%$ and $1.5 \%$ in the period.
Deflation should continue to impact results ahead. The company is passing off lower food prices onto customers. This created a 90-basis-point headwind in the first quarter. Management expects deflation to moderate some this year, but to remain a headwind.

## Wal-Mart is making moves to better

 compete with Amazon. The company launched a free two-day shipping programowned, and most stores are within 400 miles of a distribution center. Groceries accounted for $56 \%$ of U.S. sales; sales per square foot in 2016: about $\$ 420$. Has $2,300,000$ employees. Off./dir. own $51.6 \%$ of shares (4/17 proxy). Chairman: S. Robson Walton. CEO and Pres.: Doug McMillon. Inc.: DE. Addr.: 702 S.W. 8th St., Bentonville, AR 72716. Tel.: 479-273-4000. Internet: www.walmart.com.
Amazon's similar offer on orders of $\$ 50$ or more. Too, Wal-Mart will discount one million online-only items if customers agree to pick them up in-store. Elsewhere, the company continues to buy up trendy ecommerce shops. In addition to last year's purchase of Amazon rival Jet.com for \$3 billion, WMT recently bought home furnishing e-tailer Hayneedle, ShoeBuy, Women's clothing outfit ModCloth, and outdoor goods seller Moosel aw. Too, the company is reportedly in talks to purchase popular men's clothing startup Bonobos for $\$ 300$ million. We applaud this strategy and think it will help support an already strong e-commerce business. Indeed, ecommerce sales were up 15.5\% in J anuary, thanks to a $36 \%$ rise in domestic activity. Conservative investors may find these neutrally ranked shares appealing. The company continues to invest heavily to improve its online and in-store experiences, which will likely keep a lid on nearterm earnings growth. However, we think this should eventually pay off and lead to decent risk-adjusted long-term price appreciation.
Kevin Downing
April 28, 2017

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[^0]:    (A) Fiscal year ends Jan. 31st of following (losses)/gains: '01, (\$0.01); '05, \$0.03; '08, Mar., May, Aug., and Dec.■ Dividend reinvest-
    calendar year. Sales exclude rentals from li- (\$0.07); '09, \$0.04; '10, \$0.40; '11, \$0.03; '13, ment plan available.
    censed depts. (B) Based on diluted shares. (\$0.23); '15 (\$0.08). Next earnings report due (D) In millions.
    May not sum due to rounding. Excls. n/r May 18th. (C) Divds. historically paid in early
    Company's Financial Strength
    Stock's Price Stability
    Price Growth Persistence
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