

International Growth

International Equity Strategies



Third Quarter 2025

International Growth invests primarily in large cap, growth-oriented companies in both developed and emerging markets. The strategy's management team employs both top-down and bottom-up fundamental analysis to identify attractive countries and economic sectors as well as high-quality companies worthy of a long-term investment allocation. The portfolio's primary objective is long-term capital appreciation. The maximum direct exposure to emerging markets is 25% of the portfolio's total value.

Market Commentary

Over the past several months, we have noted significant interest from investors seeking to discuss, and in many cases, rediscover, the merits of investing in international equities. For much of the past 15 years, the relative performance gap between domestic and foreign stocks has been so one-sided in favor of the US that many investors have pared back, or even eliminated entirely, their foreign stock allocations. During these conversations, we have regularly and intentionally inquired as to the current average allocation to foreign stocks in their portfolios. With few exceptions, the response has typically ranged from 0%-10%. If possible, exposure to emerging market stocks is seemingly a negative percentage! While for the past decade-and-a-half performance has inarguably favored domestic over foreign developed and emerging markets, the foundation on which those returns were built appears to be shifting.

One of the most underreported stories of 2025 has been the strong performance of foreign stocks and the alpha these equities have generated above the domestic market. As of September 30, the S&P 500 has recorded a return of 14.8% on a year-to-date basis. Developed market equities outside the United States as measured by the MSCI World ex-US Index have added 25.3% during the past nine months. Most surprisingly to those who have avoided foreign exposure is that the MSCI Emerging Markets (EM) Index has gained 27.5%, nearly double that of the S&P 500 thus far in 2025. EM returns have been propelled by Taiwanese and Chinese stocks, countries that many investors have avoided due to political and geopolitical concerns, with those local markets each up 30% and 29%, respectively.

One of the largest contributing factors to foreign equity outperformance this year has been the relative weakness of the US dollar (USD), a subject we have written on extensively in the past. Why is the USD a crucial factor in determining the relative performance between domestic, foreign developed, and emerging market stocks? Based on historical data since 1970, US equities tend to outperform when the USD is strong. However, when the USD is weak, foreign stocks, especially those domiciled in emerging economies, typically outgain domestic companies. Each of these periods has proven to be lasting. Following a 14-year run of USD strength, the Confluence macroeconomic team believes that we have re-entered a period of USD weakness. Since the end of 2024, the US Dollar Index has weakened by 10%, and global equities have, at least so far, followed the typical performance pattern. Relevantly, the three historical periods of USD weakness have, on average, lasted 9.5 years. So, if a durable change in direction for the dollar has commenced, we are likely only in the initial stages.

The year-to-date outperformance of foreign equities has reduced the discount at which foreign developed markets have been trading on a Price/Earnings basis. The P/E ratio of the MSCI World ex-US Index ended the quarter at 17.5, which represents a 2% discount to the 10-year trailing average of 17.8. However, as a means of comparison, the P/E ratio of the S&P 500 has jumped to 27.8 following the post-"Liberation Day" rally. This is a 20% premium valuation compared to the 10-year trailing average of that index. While international stocks have provided fantastic results, this has yet to be associated with any premium in terms of valuation. One factor that has helped the valuation characteristics of the benchmark is that the estimate for earnings continues to be revised higher. Bloomberg now estimates earnings per share growth for the index to be at least 8% above last year and is expected to grow by 10% in 2026. The dividend yield of the index ended the quarter at 2.8% and remains a compelling differentiator, particularly for investors seeking income. Therefore, the fundamentals supporting the world's developed markets remain intact and continue to warrant an increased allocation, in our opinion.

Quarterly Trade Summary

During the quarter, we made an above-average number of purchases and sales within the International Growth portfolio to selectively upgrade a couple of holdings that exhibited declining fundamentals and to account for the acquisition of CyberArk.

See GIPS Report on pages 5-6.

Quarterly Trade Summary continued...

In late July, we reached the decision to sell long-time portfolio holding Shell plc (SHEL) and purchase Japanese technology company Disco Corporation (DSCSY). The sale of Shell was predicated on a continued decline in the price of both crude oil (down nearly 20% from early 2025 through the sale date) and UK natural gas (down 40% year-to-date through July 23). Our team believed that while prices had corrected, there was likely to be more downside in both commodities for the remainder of the year. For months, there were rumors that Shell may have been interested in purchasing British Petroleum (BP). While both companies denied having these discussions, we would view a potential purchase of BP by Shell very negatively. The sale of Shell leaves the portfolio positioned with a neutral allocation to the Energy sector when compared to the benchmark.

Proceeds from the sale of Shell were used to fund the purchase of Disco Corporation. Based in Tokyo and founded in 1937, Disco (\$30 billion market cap) is the world's largest manufacturer of specialized cutting and polishing equipment used during the semiconductor manufacturing process, with a global market share of nearly 80%. Company management has positioned Disco to be a significant beneficiary of the world's insatiable demand for and consumption of semiconductors. The company boasts gross margins above 70% and has provided long-term sales growth of 23%, EBITDA growth of 33%, and net income growth of 35%. Disco has operations in 16 countries, with China (32% of sales) being the largest single market. The Chinese are in direct competition with the US to serve as the global leader in artificial intelligence (AI), and therefore Disco should continue to benefit from Chinese efforts to build out their own native semiconductor industry.

On July 30, US-based cybersecurity firm Palo Alto Networks announced it would be purchasing Israel-domiciled CyberArk (originally purchased in the portfolio in late December 2018) for \$25 billion in cash and shares. This amount was equal to a 16% premium above the 10-day trailing closing average of CyberArk's shares. The terms of the transaction were unanimously approved by the Boards of Directors from both companies. Following an internal review, our team determined that the buyout offer equated to our calculation of full value for CyberArk. Therefore, we decided to sell our position in CyberArk in early August.

In late August, we added Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKXCY) to the International Growth portfolio. The Hong Kong Exchange is like other large exchanges such as the London Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange, providing stock, options, commodities, and futures trading along with post-trade and technological support. What makes the Hong Kong Exchange unique is that it owns the London Metals Exchange (LME), which is the world's premier industrial metals exchange and constitutes 15% of group sales. The Hong Kong Exchange is also building the Qianhai Mercantile Exchange (QME) in China. Like the LME, the QME "strives to establish a regulated and transparent nationwide spot trading platform for commodities in a systematic and organized manner, so as to facilitate the orderly development of the spot market." We believe these businesses provide the Hong Kong Exchange with significant and difficult to replicate long-term advantages. Additionally, the Hong Kong Exchange continues to benefit from Chinese companies that are moving to redomicile or co-domicile in the Hong Kong market, since regulatory pressures in the domestic market essentially force them to do so. This includes Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, and many others. Further, the Hong Kong Exchange plays a significant role in the north- and south-bound connect markets that allow domestic Chinese investors to invest in companies listed in Hong Kong. Moving forward, we believe the Chinese government will continue to push for the broadening and deepening of the Chinese domestic asset management business to diversify away from property investment, providing a long-term tailwind for investors of the Hong Kong Exchange. This portfolio addition increased the strategy's exposure to the Financials sector.

At the end of September, we bought a position in Singapore-based Sea Limited (SE). Sea is a global consumer internet company that operates three primary business units. Garena (16% of sales) is the company's digital entertainment/gaming division and is best known for developing the game *Free Fire*. Garena currently operates in 160 countries around the world, and the company specializes in promoting esports events from local levels up to the highest viewed esports matches in history. Sea's Shopee division (74% of sales) is an e-commerce platform that operates throughout Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Latin America. Shopee is working to broaden and deepen its product offerings while simultaneously investing in a proprietary delivery infrastructure. Sea's digital financial services business unit Monee (14% of sales) offers customers and vendors of the Shopee e-commerce platform access to a mobile wallet, payment processing, credit, banking, and insurtech-related products. One of the more attractive attributes of this company is that while it is domiciled in a developed market, nearly all the group sales are made in emerging market economies. Therefore, we expect Sea to continue to grow at a rate above its peers. At the time of purchase, Sea's shares were trading at a slight discount to peers on a P/E basis but were trading with a more significant discount versus peers on an EV/EBITDA basis. The addition of Sea Limited raised the portfolio's allocation to the Consumer Discretionary sector.

Even with the higher than usual activity this quarter, the three-year trailing turnover for this strategy remains within the target range at 22.8% as of 9/30/25.

Performance Review

During the third quarter, the Confluence International Growth strategy recorded a return of 5.8% (gross of fees), while the MSCI World ex-US Index gained 5.3%. On a year-to-date basis, Confluence International Growth gained 31.3% (gross of fees) versus the MSCI World ex-US at 25.3%. This is the strongest December-September return for our strategy dating back more than 25 years. On a one-year trailing basis, Confluence International Growth was up 27.5% (gross of fees) versus 16.0% for the index. [The strategy's net-of-fees returns for the same periods were 5.0% QTD, 28.4% YTD, and 23.7% one-year trailing. See disclosures on last page for fee description; actual investment advisory fees may vary.]

After a single quarter of outperformance in Q2 2025, the growth equities within the index once again materially underperformed value stocks. From a style perspective, the MSCI World ex-US Value Index has now outperformed both the broad MSCI World ex-US Index and the MSCI World ex-US Growth Index on a quarterly, year-to-date, one-, three-, five- and 10-year trailing basis. This remains in direct contrast with US equity markets, where growth has substantially outgained value for more than a decade.

Quality stocks, as measured by the MSCI World ex-US Quality Index, underperformed the broad MSCI World ex-US and both the World ex-US Growth and Value indexes during the past three-month measurement period. Quality stocks have also now underperformed the MSCI World ex-US Index on a year-to-date, one-, three-, five-, and 10-year trailing basis.

In the third quarter, the two best-performing countries in our portfolio, on an absolute basis, were Canada and Hong Kong, while Denmark and Mexico recorded the worst returns. From a sector standpoint, Materials and Consumer Discretionary were the strongest performers during the quarter, while Communication Services and Consumer Staples were the weakest.

From a relative standpoint, the most accretive country allocation was the overweight to Taiwan, followed by the underweight to Canada. An equal-weight allocation to Japan detracted the most from performance, while the underweight allocation to the United Kingdom also weighed on quarterly returns. From a sector perspective, our overweight allocation to Information Technology and equal-weight to Materials added the most alpha during the quarter. Our in-line allocation to the Communication Services sector, coupled with our underweight allocation to Energy, contributed negatively to returns.

The portfolio's top contributors and detractors year-to-date are shown in the accompanying table.¹

Security	Avg Weight (%)	Contribution (%)
Top 5		
Rheinmetall AG	4.62	8.12
Agnico Eagle Mines Ltd.	2.80	2.53
BAE Systems plc	2.65	1.97
Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing	4.50	1.91
ING Groep N.V.	2.66	1.70
Bottom 5		
LVMH Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton	1.36	(0.10)
Diageo plc	1.04	(0.33)
ICON plc	1.52	(0.45)
Novo Nordisk A.S.	1.72	(0.84)
Accenture plc	2.46	(0.89)

(Contribution data shown from a sample account, based on individual stock performance and portfolio weighting)

What We Are Watching

As the final quarter of the year begins, we are tracking several significant events that could impact the direction of global equity markets. The first development (announced on October 9) was that a phase-one peace deal had been reached between Israel and Hamas. Should this brokerage of peace prove lasting, it should help tamp down the elevated geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and remove a headwind for investors everywhere.

European equities compose nearly 58% of the MSCI World ex-US. Index. Therefore, the outlook for sustained and improved performance in foreign developed equity markets for the rest of this year and beyond will largely depend on the economic health of Europe. The European Central Bank has lowered interest rates to around 2% from a 4% level in 2023 as inflationary pressures have eased and the economic backdrop has slowed. The Bank of England has taken similar measures and reduced rates in the United Kingdom to 4% from a post-COVID high of 5.25%. Independent macroeconomic research shop Capital Economics now forecasts that full-year 2025 GDP should improve markedly over last year, which can be at least partially attributed to the lower cost of capital.

While monetary policy has been supportive, the European political climate has darkened. French President Emmanuel Macron, as of this writing, finds his government in a state of chaos as he scrambles to nominate a prime minister to help cobble together a government and develop a budgetary plan for the highly indebted country. Macron has had five different individuals fill the role of prime minister in the past two years. The fifth of those nominees, Sébastien Lecornu, resigned after only a month in the role and just 14 hours after attempting to name a new government. Calls for Macron's resignation have grown recently, but his second presidential term is not set to expire until spring 2027. Macron has worked diligently to raise France's political clout on the global stage, but this current conundrum is not aiding his aspirations.

What We Are Watching continued...

While we are closely watching French politics (France holds the fourth largest country weight, 9.6%, in the MSCI World ex-US), it is important to note that the European continent is not unaccustomed to political uncertainty. For example, Keir Starmer is the fourth British prime minister since 2022. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has also not escaped unscathed in her tenure as she has survived several no confidence votes, including one this past July and two on October 9 as members of the European Parliament have soured on her policies. From an equity market perspective, each of these unique political situations can change investor confidence and weaken or strengthen local equity markets depending on the outcome.

Turning our attention to Japan, the single largest country within the MSCI World ex-US, there is also political change afoot. Japanese Prime Minster Shigeru Ishiba, elected only one year ago, resigned in early September following a loss of majority in Japan's Upper House for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP also lost their majority in Japan's more powerful Lower House last fall. Following a short election process, Sanae Takaichi was nominated to become Japan's fifth prime minster in just five years and the first female PM of Japan. She is a hardline conservative and previously served as Japan's Economic Security Minister and Internal Affairs Minister. According to the Associated Press, Takaichi was supportive of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" program that supported growth through easy monetary policy. Apparently, she does not support additional interest rate hikes, which appears to be in opposition to the Bank of Japan's intentions to raise rates. As a result of this view, the Japanese yen (JPY) has weakened to levels not experienced since February of this year. Once she takes office as PM, we will closely scrutinize her policy initiatives as a sustained weakening of the JPY or abrupt change in monetary policy may require a shift in our Japanese equity allocation. The parliamentary vote to formally appoint Takaichi as PM should be held around October 20; however, coalition talks recently collapsed between the LDP and its junior partner, Komeito, which is complicating efforts to form a new government. This breakdown poses a significant challenge for LDP leader Takaichi as she needs to secure a partner in order to become prime minister.

While France, Japan, and other countries have managed through political disruption in the past, stability in leadership would go a long way to quell investment anxiety and potentially prove catalytic for foreign equities.

Lastly, the final quarter of 2025 has also begun with increased tensions between the United States and China surrounding trade issues. US President Trump and Chinese President Xi are scheduled to meet during an Asian forum in late October. On October 9, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and General Administration of Customs issued a notice imposing export controls on high-performance lithium batteries and substantive additional export controls on rare earth materials, extending to finished products. These actions are being taken because of the well-documented efforts by the Trump administration to severely limit China's access to advanced semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing capabilities. China's new export controls could threaten supply chains throughout the globe as the country is the world's largest exporter of rare earth materials. Therefore, the meeting between Trump and Xi becomes potentially even more significant. The outcome of these talks should determine if the most recent escalation in trade rhetoric is more about negotiating tactics or an indication of durable changes to trade terms between the world's two largest economies. That is, if the meeting transpires at all.

As always, we welcome the opportunity to discuss the topics covered in this quarterly summary or to answer questions on other subjects related to international equity investing. We thank you for your confidence in us.

Portfolio Characteristics² (as of 9/30/2025)

10 Largest Holdings	Weight
Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing	5.4%
Agnico Eagle Mines Ltd.	5.1%
Mitsubishi UFJ Financial	3.3%
Safran S.A.	3.1%
AerCap Holdings N.V.	3.1%
DBS Group Holdings Ltd.	3.1%
ING Groep N.V.	3.1%
Sandoz Group	3.1%
BAE Systems plc	3.0%
Rheinmetall AG	2.7%

Sector Allocation	Weight
Consumer Discretionary	3.8%
Consumer Staples	8.4%
Energy	1.8%
Financials	23.7%
Health Care	9.7%
Industrials	18.1%
Information Technology	17.2%
Materials	6.2%
Communication Services	4.9%
Cash	6.0%

10 Largest Countries	Weight
Japan	19.4%
France	10.7%
Switzerland	9.6%
Netherlands	8.9%
United Kingdom	7.8%
Ireland	7.8%
Canada	6.3%
Singapore	5.6%
Germany	5.5%
Taiwan	5.4%

Performance Composite Returns³ (For Periods Ending September 30, 2025)

	Since 10/1/99	25-Year*	20-year*	15-year*	10-year*	5-year*	3-year*	1-year	YTD	QTD
International Growth Pure Gross-of-Fees4	7.5%	7.4%	8.2%	8.5%	10.6%	13.3%	26.0%	27.5%	31.3%	5.8%
Max Net-of-Fees⁵	4.3%	4.2%	5.0%	5.3%	7.3%	10.0%	22.2%	23.7%	28.4%	5.0%
MSCI World ex-US (Net)	5.2%	5.2%	5.6%	6.7%	8.4%	11.6%	21.6%	16.0%	25.3%	5.3%

Calendar Year**	Pure Gross- of-Fees ⁴	Max Net- of-Fees⁵	MSCI World ex- US (Net)	Difference (Gross-MSCI World ex- US)	# of Portfolios	Composite Assets (000s)	Total Firm Assets (000s)	Composite 3yr Std Dev	MSCI World ex-US 3yr Std Dev	Composite Dispersion
2005	18.2%	14.7%	14.5%	3.8%	25	\$6,651	-	12.1%	11.3%	0.5%
2006	29.5%	25.6%	25.7%	3.8%	35	\$11,866	-	11.6%	9.5%	1.1%
2007	23.4%	19.7%	12.4%	10.9%	49	\$16,292	-	12.5%	9.7%	2.9%
2008	(37.8%)	(39.6%)	(43.6%)	5.8%	76	\$14,221	-	20.7%	19.5%	1.5%
2009	31.8%	27.9%	33.7%	(1.8%)	114	\$28,437	-	23.0%	23.9%	2.1%
2010	13.2%	9.9%	8.9%	4.3%	168	\$60,558	-	24.3%	26.3%	1.3%
2011	(11.4%)	(14.1%)	(12.2%)	0.8%	253	\$80,988	-	20.1%	22.3%	0.6%
2012	16.1%	12.7%	16.4%	(0.3%)	254	\$94,222	-	17.6%	19.0%	0.6%
2013	19.1%	15.6%	21.0%	(1.9%)	291	\$113,801	-	14.4%	16.0%	0.6%
2014	(1.7%)	(4.6%)	(4.3%)	2.6%	177	\$88,982	-	11.4%	12.7%	0.7%
2015	(2.1%)	(5.0%)	(3.0%)	0.9%	191	\$81,898	-	11.5%	12.3%	0.4%
2016	(5.1%)	(7.9%)	2.7%	(7.8%)	113	\$39,444	-	12.0%	12.3%	0.7%
2017	25.2%	21.4%	24.2%	1.0%	62	\$28,303	-	11.1%	11.7%	0.8%
2018	(13.5%)	(16.1%)	(14.1%)	0.6%	30	\$15,707	\$5,486,737	11.7%	11.1%	0.2%
2019	30.1%	26.3%	22.5%	7.6%	24	\$14,419	\$7,044,708	12.5%	10.8%	0.3%
2020	20.6%	17.1%	7.6%	13.1%	25	\$15,512	\$6,889,798	18.0%	18.1%	0.4%
2021	14.3%	10.9%	12.6%	1.7%	24	\$16,158	\$7,761,687	16.7%	17.2%	0.9%
2022	(16.5%)	(19.0%)	(14.3%)	(2.2%)	24	\$16,094	\$6,931,635	20.7%	20.1%	0.8%
2023	19.8%	16.2%	17.9%	1.8%	18	\$15,121	\$7,200,019	18.1%	16.6%	0.4%
2024	9.9%	6.6%	4.7%	5.2%	19	\$17,113	\$7,280,773	17.6%	16.6%	0.4%

^{*}Average annualized returns

See performance disclosures on last page.

Portfolio Benchmark

MSCI World ex-US (Net) Index - Free float-adjusted market capitalization index designed to measure developed market equity performance, excluding the US. Performance results presented net of estimated foreign withholding taxes on dividends, interest and capital gains. (Source: Bloomberg)

^{**}Performance History begins 10/1/1999. Additional years of performance available on our website.

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Indexes: The MSCI World ex-US Index is shown as additional information. This index is unmanaged. An investor cannot invest directly in an index. It is shown for illustrative purposes only & does not represent the performance of any specific investment. Index performance figures are reported as net returns.

- ¹ Contribution—Table showing the top 5 contributors/detractors reflects the strategy's best and worst performers (net), based on each holding's contribution to the sample account for the period stated. Individual client portfolios in the strategy may differ, sometimes significantly, from these listings.
- ² **Portfolio Characteristics**—Listings of countries and holdings do not represent all of the countries/stocks currently or previously owned in the portfolio or which Confluence may be currently recommending. Sector/country weightings and holdings of individual client portfolios in the program may differ, sometimes significantly, from these listings.
- ³Performance Composite Returns—Confluence Investment Management LLC claims compliance with the Global investment Performance Standards (GIPS®) and has prepared and presented this report in compliance with the GIPS standards. Confluence Investment Management LLC has been independently verified for the periods August 1, 2008, through December 31, 2024. The verification report is available upon request. 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 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. Verification does not provide assurance on the accuracy of any specific performance report.

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- ⁴ Pure gross returns are shown as supplemental information to the disclosures required by the GIPS® standards.
- ⁵Net of fee performance was calculated using the highest applicable annual bundled fee of 3.00% applied quarterly. This fee includes brokerage commissions, portfolio management, consulting services and custodial services. The Confluence fee schedule for this composite is as follows: 0.60% on the first \$500,000; 0.55% on the next \$500,000; and 0.50% over \$1,000,000. There are no incentive fees. Clients pay an all-inclusive fee based on a percentage of assets under management. The collection of fees produces a compounding effect on the total rate of return net of fees. Bundled fee accounts make up 100% of the composite for all periods. Actual investment advisory fees incurred by clients may vary. Wrap fee schedules are provided by independent wrap sponsors and are available upon request from the respective wrap sponsor.

A complete list of composite descriptions is available upon request. Policies for valuing investments, calculating performance, and preparing GIPS Reports are available upon request. The annual composite dispersion is an equal-weighted standard deviation, using gross-of-fee returns, calculated for the accounts in the composite for the entire year. Prior to year-end 2018, the annual composite dispersion was an asset-weighted standard deviation calculated for accounts in the composite for the entire year. The three-year annualized standard deviation measures the variability of the composite gross returns over the preceding 36-month period. The International Growth Composite contains fully discretionary International Growth wrap accounts. The International Growth portfolio invests in US-listed shares of large capitalization, growth-oriented, non-US companies from developed markets with up to 25% from emerging markets.

**Results shown for the year 1999 represent partial period performance from October 1, 1999, through December 31, 1999. N/A-Composite Dispersion: Information is not statistically meaningful due to an insufficient number of portfolios in the composite for the entire year. N/A-3yr Std Dev: Composite does not have 3 years of monthly performance history.