LIBERTY
ASSET MANAGEMENT, INC.

December 2017

By the numbers: The holiday season

At the end of every year, Americans tend to kick up their spending when they buy presents, decorations, and other items for the holiday season. Let's examine a few figures to learn how holiday spending impacts the average consumer's wallet.

$478

The expected amount that consumers will spend on gifts for family members

$218

The amount that shoppers plan to spend on food, decorations, flowers, and greeting cards

59 percent

The relative proportion of consumers who will primarily shop online for holiday goods

$682 billion

The approximate total of all holiday-related expenses in the US this year

$967.13

The amount that consumers expect to spend this holiday season

The market at a glance

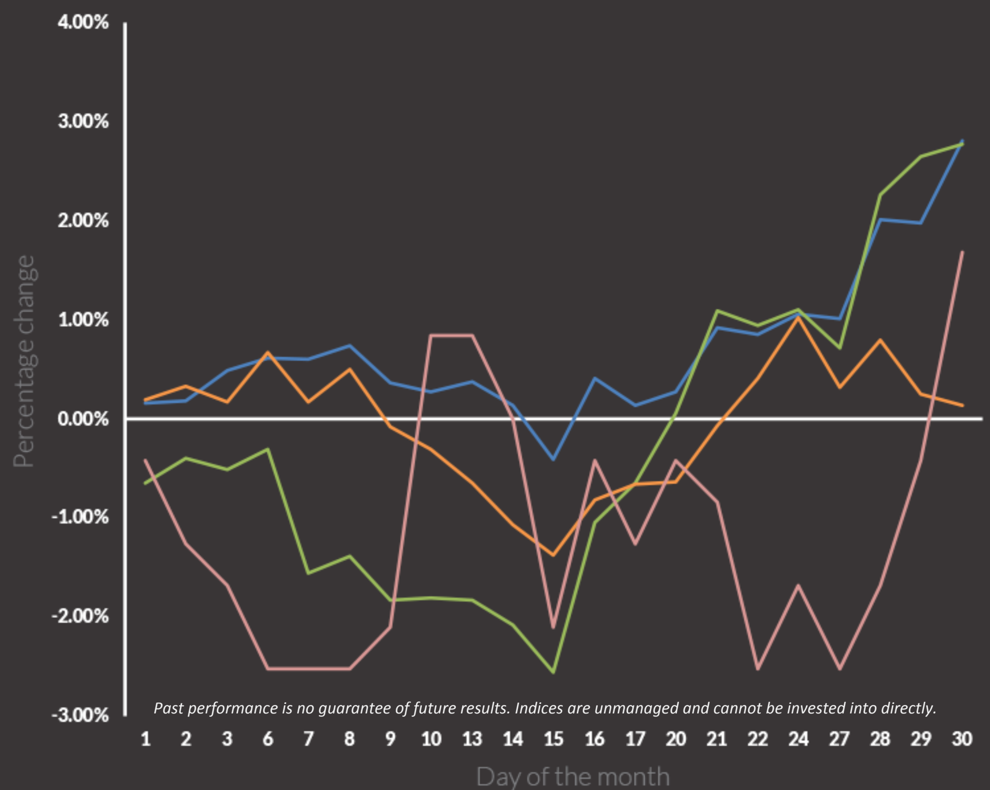
November

U.S. Large Cap
(S&P 500)
2,647.58 (2.81%) ▲

U.S. Mid/Small
(Russell 2000)
1,544.14 (2.77%) ▲

International Large
(NYSE International 100)
5,692.71 (0.13%) ▲

U.S. Treasuries
(U.S. 10-year Treasury yield rate)
2.42 (1.68%) ▲



Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Indices are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly.

The market in action

- According to a release by the Institute for Policy Studies, roughly 20 percent of American households have a net worth of zero or lower. Among the contributing factors are student loans, credit card debt, and low wage growth.
- The unemployment rate in the US has reached its lowest level since 2000, as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This comes with a near record-high 6.09 million job openings; however, wage growth in October was only 2.4 percent.
- Amazon has begun harnessing augmented reality (AR) technology in its online shopping experience. Using an app, shoppers can see how items will look in their homes before buying. The feature, called AR View, is already available on newer iOS devices and is coming soon to Android.
- New home sales in the US have reached their highest mark in 10 years, according to the Commerce Department. New home sales have increased by nearly 19 percent over the past year.
- Continuing the trend from recent years, health care costs in retirement continue to rise. A healthy couple retiring in 2017 can now expect to spend $275,000 on health care in retirement, an increase of roughly 6 percent since 2016.
- Cyber Monday is slated to be the single largest online shopping day in the history of the United States. According to Adobe Analytics, an estimated $6.6 billion was spent on the Monday following Thanksgiving this year.
- According to the Wall Street Journal, retail juggernaut Hasbro is looking to buy one of its chief competitors, Mattel. Though no merger appears imminent at the moment, the potential of a new retail powerhouse is worth watching.
- Microsoft founder Bill Gates has pledged $100 million to fund Alzheimer's research. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, and the number of individuals affected by dementia is expected to increase by 162 percent by the year 2050.

Putting 2017 to rest
Year-end financial checklist

As we near the end of the year, it is time to look back at what has happened and determine how it will affect your financial future. Check off these important items so you can start the new year's finances with peace of mind.

INCOME TAX

- Review your tax withholdings.
  Have you had a major life change (e.g., employment change, marriage/divorce, a new child) that affects your income tax? Check to make sure your tax withholdings have been properly adjusted. Having low withholdings can lead to tax penalties, while having too high of withholdings prevents you from accessing your money until your tax return is filed.

- Estimate your adjusted gross income (AGI).
  Determine your AGI with the help of your tax advisor. Your AGI will help determine your tax bracket, which you will need for investment and retirement planning.

- Estimate your Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT).
  Determine whether you will be subject to the AMT and if there are ways to mitigate your AMT liability.

FAMILY FUNDING

- Check your flexible savings account (FSA)
  The government only permits a $500 annual rollover in an FSA; any excess funds disappear if unused by the end of the year. If you have extra money in your FSA, you may want to schedule necessary medical or dental procedures before the end of the year.

- Check your health savings account (HSA)
  HSA funds do not disappear at the end of each year like with an FSA; however, many with few medical needs discover money accumulating in their HSAs much faster than they are using it. Consider reducing your contributions to your HSA if your account has reached a comfortable amount and you know of better uses for your money.

- Consider contributions to a 529 plan to fund your children's/grandchildren's education
  529 plans allow you to contribute to a tax-free account that may be used to pay for qualifying secondary education expenses. (Investors should consider investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses associated with 529 plans before using them. Information about 529 plans is available in their issuers' official statements.)

INVESTMENTS

- [ ] **Consider tax-loss harvesting to lower taxes on capital gains**
By selling positions that are down this year, you can use the losses to reduce up to $3,000 of taxable income. If your total losses surpass $3,000, you can roll over excess losses to offset gains in another year. If you have losses from a previous year, calculate how they affect your gains or losses from this year.

- [ ] **Check to make sure you did not make (or plan on making) any "wash sales"**
A wash sale is the sale of an asset followed by a repurchase of a similar asset within 30 days. The IRS does not allow capital losses on wash sales. If you have already made a wash sale, do not plan on the capital losses being available for tax use this year.

- [ ] **Check to see when you last rebalanced your portfolio**
Although you do not need to update your investments every year, many people go far too long without making necessary adjustments as they age.

RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS

- [ ] **If you are retired, make sure you have taken all required minimum distributions (RMDs)**
RMDs may be one of the most important items to review when going over your finances at the end of the year. Standard IRAs require these distributions be taken annually after the year you turn 70 ½; standard 401(k)s require them annually after you retire or turn 70 ½ (whichever is earlier). Failure to take an RMD will trigger a 50 percent excise tax on the value of the RMD.

- [ ] **Max contributions to an IRA and employer retirement plan for the year**
Both IRAs and 401(k)s have annual contribution limits. If you find you have excess savings and have not reached your annual limit, it may be a good idea to make additional contributions. Similarly, you may also consider making greater monthly contributions to your accounts next year, spreading out the cost of contribution. The deadline for IRA contributions is usually April 15 of the following year, though this may vary; 401(k) deadlines may be restricted to the calendar year, depending on your employer.

- [ ] **Consider converting a traditional IRA to a Roth IRA**
Did you have a good tax year? It may be an opportune time to convert a portion (or all) of your traditional IRA to a Roth IRA and pay your taxes at a lower rate. It is important to understand, however, that Roth accounts have contribution limits placed on them, so keeping a traditional IRA might be beneficial. Before making any changes, consider seeking the help of a professional accountant who can help you with the conversion and calculate your new tax liability.

GIVING

- **Donate to charity as a way to reduce taxes**
  You can lower taxable income by 50 or 30 percent with a gift to a public charity or by 30 or 20 percent with a gift to a private foundation. If your gift exceeds these limits, you can roll over the excess deduction for up to five years.

- **Reduce your estate through gifts**
  You are permitted to give up to $14,000 ($28,000 for married couples) a year per recipient as an untaxed gift. Gifts above this value will consume part of your lifetime gift/estate tax exemption amount ($5,490,000 in 2017). If a gift directly funds education tuition or pays for qualified medical expenses, it will go untaxed no matter what the value.

LIBERTY ASSET MANAGEMENT, INC.
6725 Kingery Hwy Willowbrook, IL 60527
Tel: 630.789.9653 | Fax: 630.734.1471
www.libertyassetmgt.com