


BUSINESS: Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. is the world's largest retailer, op erating 3,288 supercenters (includes sizable grocery departments), 508 discount stores, 632 Sam's Clubs, and 407 Neighborhood Markets in the U.S., plus 6,107 foreign stores, mainly in Latin America, with the balance in Asia, Canada, and the U.K. as of $1 / 31 / 14$. Total store space: 1.101 billion square feet. Retail space is largely
Wal-Mart should continue reporting lackluster results. As expected, domestic same-store sales came in flat for the J uly quarter. Management was not pleased and looks to gain an edge in the market with innovative mobile-based promotional tactics like the Savings Catcher price-match program, more-localized merchandise selections, and a new opening price point private-label line, Price First. We are skeptical that these maneuvers will be enough to fully offset reserved spending by Wal-Mart's continuously cash-strapped and increasingly bargain-savvy core customer base of low- and middle-income consumers. Further, cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), have had a negative impact on sales for the past three quarters. The legislation change will be anniversaried this November, but ought to hurt results in the meantime.
The company is adjusting its priorities. During the recent analyst meeting management laid out a plan to slow its supercenter footprint expansion. After nearly a year of pressure from investors, WMT finally appears ready to focus
owned, and most stores are within 400 miles of a distribution center. Groceries accounted for $55 \%$ of U.S. sales; sales per square foot in 2013: about $\$ 433$. Has $2,200,000$ employees. Off./dir. own $50.6 \%$ of shares ( $4 / 14$ 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.
more on improving stock availability and customer service via a significant increase in labor hours. Surprisingly, the expansion of small format Neighborhood Market and Wal-Mart Express stores is being put on hold as the company analyzes which regions to compete in as well as the product mix. This is likely a response to competition with dollar stores in urban markets as well as cannibalization from supercenters.
Operating income may suffer over the near term. The aforementioned labor costs coupled with heightened investment in the e-commerce platform will likely squeeze margins for several quarters.
We find these shares suitable for longterm investors. The challenging retail environment will likely keep comps flat over the near term. This, combined with a slowing footprint and increased investment in customer satisfaction and the omnichannel shopping experience, puts a damper on our near-term outlook. Eventually, we expect these investments to pay off in the form of increased samestore sales and earnings. Also, WMT shares receive our Highest Safety rank (1). Kevin Downing

Company's Financial Strength Stock's Price Stability Stock's Price Stability
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