Value

The Devil in HML's Details

June 1, 2013

This paper challenges the standard method for measuring “value” used in academic work on factor pricing. This is particularly true for the high-minus-low factor (HML), which is based on the observation that companies with high book-to-market ratios (value stocks) outperform those with low ones (growth stocks).

The standard method calculates book-to-price (B/P) at portfolio formation using lagged book data, aligns price data using the same lag (ignoring recent price movements), and holds these values constant until the next rebalance. Thus by the time the data is updated the price used to determine “value” is 18 months old.

We propose two simple alternatives that use timelier price data while retaining the necessary lag for book data. We construct portfolios based on the different measures for a U.S. sample (1950–2011) and an international sample (1983–2011). We show that B/P ratios based on timelier prices better forecast true (unobservable) B/P ratios at fiscal year end.

We then show that in the context of a five-factor model including momentum, this logically superior value measure is actually superior in terms of returns. We further extend this to a monthly updated value strategy and find that, for precisely analogous reasons, the return advantage grows far stronger.

Value portfolios based on the timeliest measures earn statistically significant alphas ranging from 305 to 378 basis points per year.

The bottom line is that while the standard approach to value was a reasonable and conservative choice that has served the field well, it is not the best possible choice.

This document is not intended to, and does not relate specifically to any investment strategy or product that AQR offers. It is being provided merely to provide a framework to assist in the implementation of an investor’s own analysis and an investor’s own view on the topic discussed herein.

This document has been provided to you solely for information purposes and does not constitute an offer or solicitation of an offer or any advice or recommendation to purchase any securities or other financial instruments and may not be construed as such. The factual information set forth herein has been obtained or derived from sources believed by the author and AQR Capital Management, LLC (“AQR”) to be reliable but it is not necessarily all-inclusive and is not guaranteed as to its accuracy and is not to be regarded as a representation or warranty, express or implied, as to the information’s accuracy or completeness, nor should the attached information serve as the basis of any investment decision. This document is not to be reproduced or redistributed to any other person. The information set forth herein has been provided to you as secondary information and should not be the primary source for any investment or allocation decision. Past performance is not a guarantee of future performance. Diversification does not eliminate the risk of experiencing investment losses.

This material is not research and should not be treated as research. This paper does not represent valuation judgments with respect to any financial instrument, issuer, security or sector that may be described or referenced herein and does not represent a formal or official view of AQR. The views expressed reflect the current views as of the date hereof and neither the author nor AQR undertakes to advise you of any changes in the views expressed herein.

The information contained herein is only as current as of the date indicated, and may be superseded by subsequent market events or for other reasons. Charts and graphs provided herein are for illustrative purposes only. The information in this presentation has been developed internally and/or obtained from sources believed to be reliable; however, neither

AQR nor the author guarantees the accuracy, adequacy or completeness of such information. Nothing contained herein constitutes investment, legal, tax or other advice nor is it to be relied on in making an investment or other decision. There can be no assurance that an investment strategy will be successful. Historic market trends are not reliable indicators of actual future market behavior or future performance of any particular investment which may differ materially, and should not be relied upon as such. Diversification does not eliminate the risk of experiencing investment losses.

The information in this paper may contain projections or other forward-looking statements regarding future events, targets, forecasts or expectations regarding the strategies described herein, and is only current as of the date indicated. There is no assurance that such events or targets will be achieved, and may be significantly different from that shown here. The information in this document, including statements concerning financial market trends, is based on current market conditions, which will fluctuate and may be superseded by subsequent market events or for other reasons.