Oberweis Asset Management

MICRO-CAP GROWTH MARKET COMMENTARY

4Q 2025

The Quarter in Review

The Oberweis Micro-Cap Composite returned -0.86% (-1.08% net of fees) in the fourth quarter compared to 2.14% for the benchmark Russell Microcap Growth Index, a shortfall of 300 basis points (322 basis points net of fees). For the full year, the composite returned 16.20% (15.20% net of fees) compared to 21.84% for the index, lagging by 564 basis points (664 basis points net of fees).

Crap was king in 2025 as performance during both the quarter and the year was impacted by the low-quality nature of the microcap rally. Non-earners and the lowest ROE quintile were the strongest performing groups in both time periods[1]. Although many of our portfolio holdings aren't household names, our microcap portfolio is higher quality given our focus on earnings surprise, valuation, balance sheets, and cash flows. At year-end, the portfolio was 87% invested in profitable companies[2] compared to only 47% profitability exposure in the index and only 10% exposed to the lowest ROE quintile.

To say 2025 was wild might be the understatement of the year itself. Seldom in our long careers – absent the Global Financial Crisis and the pandemic – have we had to navigate such tricky and ever-changing market currents. Volatility related to tariffs early in the year gave way to a surprisingly severe quality crash in small caps last fall, a dislocation that was only partially resolved by year-end. We're not sure why this occurred but we know historically that quality mean-reverts quickly and that both profitability[3] and earnings quality[4] are positive performance drivers over the long-term.

As we look forward to 2026, we still see a generational opportunity related to small cap companies (and micro caps as a subset) compared to large caps. Our universe is about as loved as a below-zero winter day in Chicago, and it remains shockingly cheap on numerous relative performance metrics[5]. Large caps have led for over a decade, but we remind those with recency bias that small caps have led over the long-term.

The universal proxy for "the market" – the S&P 500 – is now the most top-heavy in history with the top 10 stocks representing 41% of that cap-weighted index. While the consensus opinion is their "magnificence" is deserved, history suggests otherwise. A decade from now, a majority of those 10 companies will likely no longer be market darlings, just as past heavyweights have lost their luster. In 1975, General Motors and Ford were two of the three largest companies in America. In 1985, IBM reigned supreme. A decade later, the market was led by GE and AT&T, and by 2005 the biggest of the big were GE and Exxon. Only two companies in the top 10 a decade ago (Apple and Microsoft) are still there today. Go against history at your own risk.

[1]Based on Russell 2000 Growth Index data, of which microcap is a subset. Non earners returned 8.32% in the fourth quarter and 27.82% in 2025. The lowest ROE quintile returned 4.55% in the fourth quarter and 23.71% in 2025.
[2]As of 12/31/2025, 86.7% of the portfolio was invested in companies that were profitable in their latest reported quarter.
[3]MSCI Barra US Small Cap 4 Model factor performance during 2025. According to MSCI, the Barra Profitability Factor "measures the return to equity and debt holders as well as the company's profit margin. The descriptors in this factor are Sales Profit Margin, Return on Equity, Return on Assets, and the ratio of earnings to enterprise value."
[4]MSCI Barra US Small Cap 4 Model factor performance during 2025. The Earnings Quality Factor "explains the return differences between high earnings quality and low earnings quality stocks". The descriptors in this factor are accruals, cash-earnings-to-earnings ratio, and variability of sales.
[5]According to Jefferies, the Russell 2000 Index, relative to the Russell 1000 Index, trades at a 24% discount on trailing P/E (vs long-term average), a 26% discount on price/book, and a 20% discount on price/sales

AVERAGE ANNUAL TOTAL RETURNS ***(as of December 31, 2025)***

	QTD	1 Yr	3 Yr	5 Yr	10 Yr	Since Inception 1/1/1996
Micro-Cap Growth (gross of fees)	**-0.86%**	**16.20%**	**20.29%**	**19.64%**	**19.23%**	**13.61%**
Micro-Cap Growth (net of fees)	**-1.08%**	**15.20%**	**19.29%**	**18.63%**	**18.22%**	**12.58%**
Russell Microcap Growth Index	2.14%	21.84%	17.46%	2.81%	7.82%	N/A

Past performance is not necessarily indicative of future results. Performance is historical and includes the reinvestment of dividends and other income. Unusually high returns may not be sustainable. The strategy invests in rapidly growing smaller and medium-sized companies that may offer greater return potential. However, these investments often involve greater risks and volatility. Foreign investments involve greater risks than U.S. investments, including political and economic risks and the risk of currency fluctuations. Net-of-fee composite returns are calculated using the highest model investment advisory fees applicable to portfolios within the composite. Advisory fees are disclosed in Part II of Form ADV.

Oberweis Asset Management, Inc. ("OAM") is an independent investment management firm that is not affiliated with any parent organization. The composite returns are comprised of all fully discretionary accounts with a minimum value of $5 million. Performance results, from 1-1-96 until 12-31-03 and 9-1-11 to present were derived solely from the performance of the Oberweis Micro-Cap Fund, a registered, open-end mutual fund, for which OAM serves as investment adviser. Accounts are dollar-weighted within the composite and reported in U.S. dollars.

The Russell Microcap Growth Index measures the performance of those Russell Micro Cap companies with higher price-to-book ratios and higher forecasted growth values. The performance data includes reinvested dividends. The Russell Microcap Index is represented by the smallest 1,000 securities in the small cap Russell 2000 Index plus the next 1,000 securities. Each index is an unmanaged group of stocks, whose performance does not reflect the deduction of fees, expenses or taxes. It is not possible to invest directly in an index.

The Quarter in Review (continued)

One possible danger for those dearly beloved: free cash flow compression. AI hyperscaler spending is projected to increase from $240 billion in 2024 to over $600 billion in 2027 as tech titans face a high stakes prisoner's dilemma: spend aggressively on AI with an uncertain return on investment or sit on the sidelines and face potentially fatal business-model risk. In our experience, free cash flow compression and declining ROI usually equals multiple compression.

Interestingly, we are starting to think the risk to the megacaps could be a panacea for micro cap companies. We wonder aloud if the productivity benefits from AI workflows could disproportionately accrue to smaller companies that are less bureaucratic, nimbler, and more likely to benefit incrementally from "white collar robotics" efficiency gains. It seems reasonable to question the ability of highly complex multi-national conglomerates to benefit from AI. The opportunity is large: only 17% of US businesses are currently using AI in any business function, and we are starting to think the margin benefits for micro cap businesses might be material. AI is a force multiplier and could help micro cap companies act big without a lot of cost. Historically, the cost of automation was more prohibitive for small companies and AI is changing that.

Not all small cap companies are created equal, however. Nearly 40% of the small cap universe (and 53% of the micro cap universe) is comprised of unprofitable companies, a byproduct of a decade-plus of easy money. Profitable small caps – which is our fishing pond – are even cheaper and represent, in our view, one of the most attractive subsets of the U.S. equity market. We see it in our universe P/E, which remains below median, and in the valuation upside of our individual holdings. Our belief: profitable U.S. small caps and micro caps will outperform the U.S. equity market over the next 10 years driven by a more normalized cost of capital versus the pre-pandemic period. To think otherwise is to think it will be different this time, and that's a market lesson as old as time.

A word of caution about everyone's favorite boogeyman – the "macro risk." The market likes to throw an occasional macro tantrum as we saw last spring, and there is currently an abnormally long list of potential pitfalls. Foreign policy hotspots are more abundant than usual and could goose volatility. The midterm elections have economic implications and could be particularly contentious this year. President Trump's desire to reduce long-term interest rates could be impeded by market forces more concerned about sustained deficits, tariff policy, and Federal Reserve independence, which may prompt him in turn to respond with characteristically bold executive action. Interestingly, we think a sustained and normalized cost of capital would be good for our Fund because it would force investors to focus more on earnings and valuation – long hallmarks of our approach.

As skilled stock pickers, however, we believe not in a stock market but in a market of stocks. High volatility creates disconnects between company fundamentals and stock prices that provide us with a target-rich investing opportunity. Our bottom-up strategy has always been focused on investing in businesses with idiosyncratic attributes that we believe will result in positive earnings surprises driven by misunderstood fundamental change. While the earnings multiples paid for such companies can vary in the short-run, we believe a diversified portfolio of companies with better-than-expected earnings growth prospects is likely to outperform the market in the long-run.

Portfolio Highlights

As of December 31, 2025, the portfolio was 99.4% invested in 80 different positions. The portfolio had its largest over-weightings in industrials (24.4% average weighting during the quarter versus 14.7% for the Russell Microcap Growth Index), consumer discretionary (11.2% versus 4.5%) and technology (23.3% versus 20.6%). The portfolio was most underweight healthcare (22.1% versus 36.9%), materials (0.8% versus 4.3%), and energy (2.0% versus 3.4%).

Performance in the fourth quarter was positively impacted by strong stock selection in technology (where our holdings returned -2.9% versus a -8.0% return for the benchmark's technology holdings) and energy (+10.1% versus -16.6%). Our underweight allocation to healthcare had a substantial negative impact on performance in the quarter as well as (to a lesser degree) our stock selection in that sector (15.1% versus 22.7%). The biotech industry, which we are consistently underweight because of an incongruence with our investment philosophy, was the primary reason for the portfolio's healthcare shortfall in the quarter. Biotechs within the Russell 2000 Growth Index, many of which are unprofitable, returned 28.1% during the period.

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Organization Update

There was no change to the team during the quarter.

Oberweis Asset Management's Investment Philosophy

We believe that investing in smaller companies driving revenue and earnings growth in excess of expectations results in superior investment performance over long periods of time. We believe that innovation is the key to economic growth and wealth creation and are committed to investing in companies at the forefront of innovation – smaller company stocks that offer the potential for extraordinary revenue and earnings growth.

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well at these companies. Many are nimble and uniquely address the needs of their customers with patented new products and services. Successful investing, however, demands more than finding companies with good growth prospects. We must also buy these stocks for our clients at prices that make sense. By paying careful attention to companies' valuations in relation to expected earnings growth rates, we seek to purchase stocks when they still have considerable appreciation potential.

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