

Brandes Investment Partners
International Equity Strategy Notes
Third Quarter 2025 (July 1 – September 30, 2025)

The Brandes International Equity Strategy rose 8.02% net of fees and 8.12% gross of fees, outperforming its benchmark, the MSCI EAFE Index, which was up 4.77% in the quarter, and the MSCI EAFE Value Index, which returned 7.39%.

| Annualized total return as of September 30, 2025 | 1-year | 5-year | 10-year |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Brandes International Equity Composite (net) | 20.49% | 18.76% | 9.79% |
| Brandes International Equity Composite (gross) | 21.02% | 19.27% | 10.30% |
| MSCI EAFE Index | 14.99% | 11.15% | 8.16% |

Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. One cannot invest directly in an index. Returns include reinvestment of all dividends and are reduced by any applicable foreign withholding taxes, without provisions for income taxes, if any.

Positive Contributors

Select tech-related holdings in emerging markets were among the leading contributors, including China-based Alibaba, South Korean Samsung Electronics, and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC).

China-based Alibaba saw solid gains driven by aggressive investment plans in artificial intelligence (AI) and continued growth in AI-related products and cloud revenue. Additionally, the company's core e-commerce platforms were boosted by a recovery in Chinese consumer spending. Samsung and TSMC also benefited from positive AI sentiment, which helped lift their share prices.

Other standout performers included French luxury goods company Kering, Mexican cement producer Cemex, and Canada-based technology firm Open Text.

Both Cemex and Open Text appreciated as their operating leverage improved, and their end markets strengthened. Meanwhile, Kering rose due to the anticipated turnaround efforts led by incoming CEO Luca de Meo, combined with promising signs for the core Gucci brand under new creative leadership. In our view, the company continues to have upside potential as management focuses on brand equity, cost cutting, and financial discipline, which could position it well for margin recovery and long-term growth.

Performance Detractors

Rising political uncertainty weighed on several of our holdings in France. Despite being global companies with a diversified revenue base, our positions in information technology (IT) services company Capgemini, pharmaceutical firm Sanofi, and ad agency Publicis all declined.

For Capgemini, the countrywide headwind was exacerbated by concerns about the impact of AI on the IT services industry, as well as policy uncertainty in the U.S. regarding immigrant visas, on which the industry commonly relies on for talent mobility. Amid these challenges, we believe Capgemini is well positioned to benefit from a recovery in its European industrial end-markets and from increased corporate spending related to the deployment of enterprise AI applications.

Health care and consumer staples were the two weakest-performing sectors in the MSCI EAFE Index. Although most of our holdings in both sectors did well, with the exception of U.K.-based WPP and Netherlands' Heineken Holdings which both declined, our overweights detracted from relative returns. Our underweight to financials, which was among the strongest-performing sectors in the benchmark, also hurt relative performance.

Select Activity in the Quarter

The investment committee initiated a position in Japanese industrial firm SMC Corporation and divested our holdings in South Korea's Hana Financial and Germany-based construction materials company Heidelberg Materials.

SMC Corporation is the world's largest manufacturer of pneumatic components, holding nearly 40% global market share. Pneumatics are used in a wide range of industrial applications—from robotics and packaging to medical and automotive systems. SMC's products are typically a small percentage of total system cost, but they are critical to functionality, which has historically contributed to the company's high returns on invested capital.

SMC's shares have declined nearly 50% from their March 2024 peak, driven by margin compression and slowing revenue growth. These pressures were largely cyclical and tied to SMC's aggressive capacity expansion program, which began in 2021 as part of a strategic push to reach ¥1 trillion in annual sales by 2026.

Despite near-term headwinds, SMC maintains a strong balance sheet with net cash and investments equal to over a quarter of its market capitalization. The company has also demonstrated consistent profitability and capital discipline, with dividends and share repurchases rising significantly since 2019.

SMC's global scale and product breadth allow it to deliver parts within four days across major markets, supporting its "one-stop shop" value proposition. While competition from Chinese and Taiwanese firms, particularly Airtac, has raised concerns, SMC has been able to maintain its market share in China over the past decade. Airtac's gains have largely come at the expense of smaller local players, and its recent exit from the U.S. market suggests that it has had limited success in expanding internationally. This reinforces our confidence in SMC's ability to defend its global position.

The company's geographic and industry diversification further supports its resilience. SMC generates revenue across various sectors including semiconductors, automotive, food, and medical, and across regions such as Japan, North America, Europe, and Greater China. Its exposure to factory automation trends provides a long-term tailwind, even as the pneumatics segment grows more slowly than robotics.

In our view, SMC represents a compelling value opportunity in a high-quality industrial franchise with limited technological disruption risk. The company's dominant market position, strong balance sheet, and strategic investments position it well for margin recovery and long-term growth if its utilization improves and the factory automation cycle recovers. While competitive pressures warrant monitoring, the current valuation compensates for these risks, making SMC an appealing investment for us.

Year-to-Date Briefing

The Brandes International Equity Strategy rose 31.66% net of fees and 32.11% gross of fees, outperforming its benchmark, the MSCI EAFE Index, which appreciated 25.14% in the nine months ended September 30, 2025, and the MSCI EAFE Value Index, which rose 31.92%.

Although the outperformance of value stocks (MSCI EAFE Value vs. MSCI EAFE) has been a tailwind for the strategy given our value exposure, it was our stock selection across various sectors and countries that mostly drove our outperformance relative to the benchmark. Leading contributors included holdings in emerging markets, led by Alibaba, Samsung, and Brazil's Embraer, as well as Mexico-based Cemex and Fibra Uno. Other contributors included European holdings such as materials company Heidelberg Materials and France-based Orange and BNP Paribas.

Meanwhile, our underweight to financials, along with overweights to health care and consumer staples, hurt relative returns, even though stock selection impact was positive in all three sectors. At the holding level, notable detractors included ad agencies WPP and Publicis, consumer products company Henkel, and pharmaceutical firm Sanofi.

Current Positioning

With our index-agnostic investment approach, our portfolio continues to look different than both the MSCI EAFE Index and the MSCI EAFE Value Index. Its largest overweights are in consumer staples and health care, while its most notable underweights are in financials and industrials. Over the past year, we have increased our exposure to consumer staples and technology, in which the portfolio now has an overweight position. In contrast, we have pared back our allocation to strong performing financials holdings. Geographically, we continue to have a larger weighting to businesses in Europe and select emerging markets, particularly Mexico, South Korea, and Brazil.

We remain confident in the portfolio's composition, which in our opinion strikes a good balance between defensive and cyclical holdings. Additionally, a meaningful portion of the portfolio is allocated to domestically oriented companies, which tend to be better positioned to withstand external pressures (e.g., tariffs, trade disputes) than their export-driven peers. Among our holdings with global exposure, we take comfort in their solid competitive positions in their respective industries, which should help them navigate tariff-related challenges.

For much of the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, international stocks had underperformed U.S. stocks (MSCI EAFE vs. MSCI USA), and within the international equity asset class, value stocks had lagged the broader market (MSCI EAFE Value vs. MSCI EAFE). As a result, many investors are likely under-allocated to international value stocks.

This year's appreciation and outperformance of international stocks—especially value—have been a positive development for us, and we view this as a timely reminder of the benefit of diversification. Despite the strong rebound, international value stocks continue to trade within the least expensive valuation quartile relative to growth stocks (MSCI EAFE Value vs. MSCI EAFE Growth) since the inception of the style indices. This valuation gap is evident across multiple metrics, including price/earnings, price/cash flow, and enterprise value/sales. Historically, such discount levels often preceded attractive relative returns for value stocks over the subsequent three- to five-year period. This is encouraging for us as our strategy, guided by our value philosophy and process, has had the tendency to outperform the value index when it outperformed the benchmark.

The Brandes International Equity Strategy trades at more compelling valuation levels, in our opinion, while offering more attractive long-term growth characteristics relative to both the benchmark and the MSCI EAFE Value Index. We believe the strategy is well-positioned to benefit if there is a continued rotation toward value and international equities. Looking ahead, we remain optimistic about the prospects of our holdings.

For term definitions, please refer to <https://www.brandes.com/termdefinitions>.

For index definitions, please refer to <https://www.brandes.com/benchmark-definitions>.

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