

3M Company reported decent results to close out 2012, and likely got off to a solid start this year. The diversified manufacturer and technology company topped our fourth-quarter sales target by slightly more than $\$ 200$ million, as organic (local-currency) revenue growth was higher than anticipated. Share earnings, meanwhile, came in two pennies below our estimate, which was mostly due to a combination of the challenging economic climate and foreign exchange headwinds. We think the conglomerate will report decent results for the recently ended March quarter, as growth in emerging markets should offset softness in moreestablished geographies. Better operational performance and higher prices should help bolster margins, and share repurchases should boost bottom-line comparisons. All told,

## We expect to see a similar story as

 2013 continues to unfold. The operating environment will probably remain soft, especially in Europe, so 3M Company has its work cut out for it. That said, we actually added $\$ 300$ million to our full-year sales target. Operating margin expansion willGraphics (11.7\%); and Electro \& Communications (10.6\%). 2012 R\&D: $\$ 1.6$ billion, $5.5 \%$ of sales. Employs about 87,700 . Officers \& BlackRock, 5.9\% (3/13 proxy). Chairman, President \& CEO: Paul, MN 55144. Telephone: 651-733-1110. Internet: www.3m.com.
likely be a bit less pronounced than we previously anticipated, however, so we trimmed three pennies from our shareprofit call.
We are introducing our 2014 estimates in this Issue. For now, we think sales and share-earnings growth will be $5 \%$ and $9 \%$, respectively. We think the Industrial \& Transportation and Healthcare groups will continue driving the bulk of the advances in the near term.
The board recently increased the quarterly payout. I ndeed, the conglomerate boosted the annual dividend by $8 \%$, to $\$ 2.54$ a share. Also, as noted above, share repurchases are likely to continue for the foreseeable future, as free cash flow is ample.
This blue chip remains a timely selection, thanks to a steady string of favorable earnings comparisons and strong share-price momentum. The equity is now trading at an all-time high, however, so long-term capital appreciation potential leaves a bit to be desired in our opinion. Still, this issue is a decent pick for conservative and income investors.
Erik A. Antonson
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