

## Investment Perspectives

March 2026

# Thinking Beyond the Benchmark

*Seeking the high-quality sweet spot with the Kayne Anderson Rudnick Small Cap Core strategy*

## Active or Passive?

In our opinion, so much of today’s investment advice boils down to this simple, and perhaps overly simplistic, question: Should I pay for active management with the hopes of generating excess investment returns or instead “buy the benchmark” through a lower-cost index fund? In the race for investment returns, index investing can make a compelling case as compared to many active equity strategies.

We believe, however, in the U.S. small-cap equity asset class, the benchmark does not always provide the most compelling returns, as evidenced by the chart on the next page (Small Cap Core Universe Comparison). This chart shows that many, if not most, active managers in the U.S. small-cap asset class, have outperformed the Russell 2000 benchmark over 3-, 5-, 10- and 20-year time frames. How these managers have achieved their excess returns, and the corresponding risk taken, can vary widely. We believe investors should pay close attention to how returns by active managers have been achieved over multiple time periods, focusing on the consistency of excess returns over time.

When comparing returns of active managers to their benchmark, investors should review the underlying holdings in these portfolios.

In our view, the quality of the underlying businesses held in a portfolio is an important factor in the consistency of investment performance, and we believe that investing in quality businesses is an important contributor to capturing greater risk-adjusted returns, not just relative to the Russell 2000 Index but to the overall equity market.

By focusing on companies with protected and differentiated business models, the KAR portfolio management team creates a portfolio of businesses that exhibit strong fundamental characteristics, such as a high return on equity and invested capital, low debt-to-capital ratios, strong free cash flow, and consistent profitability. We believe these financial characteristics are strong indicators of a company’s durability and competitive position within its industry.

Quality may seem like a secondary factor during periods when the U.S. equity markets are advancing in a consistent manner and in particularly pronounced bull markets. However, in our opinion, quality companies tend to stand out when equity markets correct. We believe it is during these more difficult market environments that quality counts.



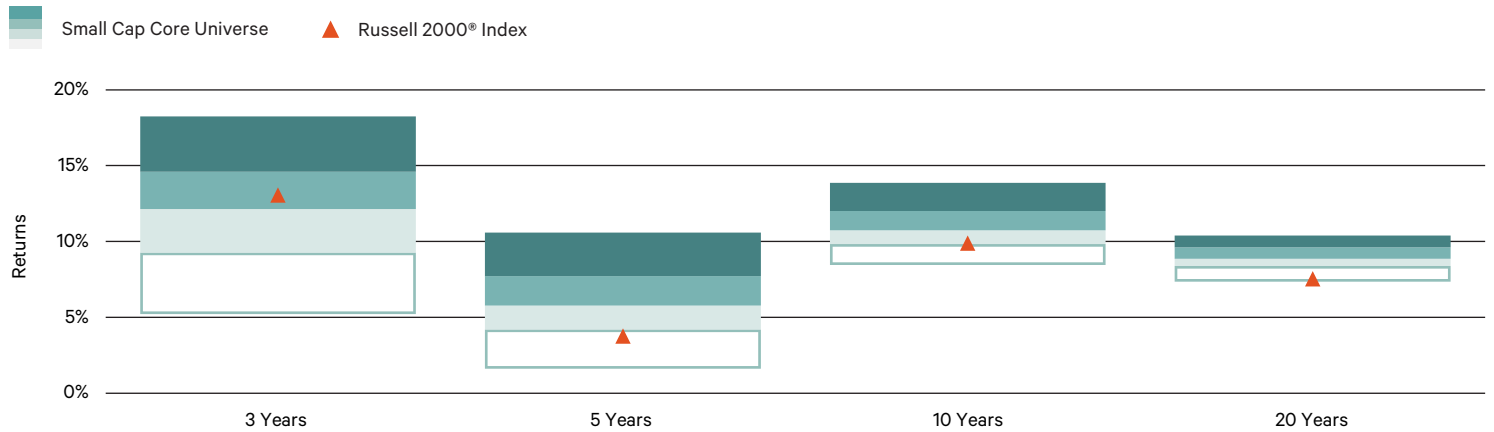
Our mission is identifying the highest quality businesses in which to invest. Benchmarks, in our view, are not built with the same discretion.

### Percent of Unprofitable Companies:

KAR Small Cap Core:	0%
Russell 2000® Index:	41%

*Data as of March 31, 2026. Source: FactSet Research Systems. Unprofitable companies are defined as those companies with zero or negative net profits.*

**SMALL CAP CORE UNIVERSE COMPARISON: Annualized Returns**



Data as of March 31, 2026. Source: FactSet Research Systems. The Small Cap Core Universe includes all managers categorized in the Small Cap Core asset class by eVestment. To the extent actual performance results are shown in comparison to an index, the index is not actively managed and does not reflect the deduction of any investment management or other fees and expenses. Indices are not available for direct investment. This information is being provided by Kayne Anderson Rudnick Investment Management, LLC (“KAR”) for illustrative purposes only. **Past performance is no guarantee of future results.**

## Profiting from Companies with Strong Fundamentals

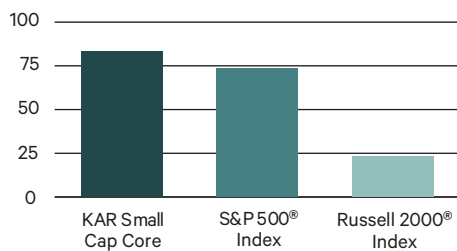
To get a sense of why we believe quality counts, take a look at one of our actively managed investments: the KAR Small Cap Core strategy. It invests in the small-company universe benchmarked to the Russell 2000 Index.

In our view, our focus on quality gives our Small Cap Core strategy stronger fundamental characteristics and, subsequently, better risk and-reward characteristics than both the benchmark small-cap universe and the larger market, as measured by the S&P 500 Index.

## What’s In Our Investment Portfolio?

### HIGH-QUALITY STOCKS

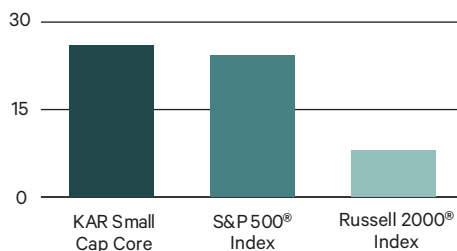
Percentage of Holdings with S&P Quality Rankings\* of B+ or Above



We seek the benefits of small company exposure, with higher-quality stocks.

### PROFITS

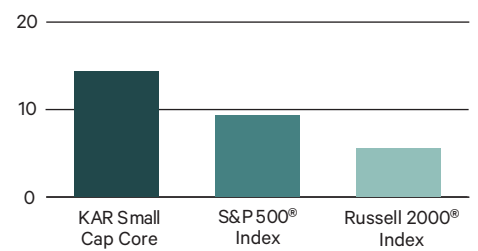
Five-Year Return on Equity



We believe profitable companies produce better returns and are more likely to sustain in volatile markets.

### DEBT COVERAGE

Interest Coverage Expense Ratio

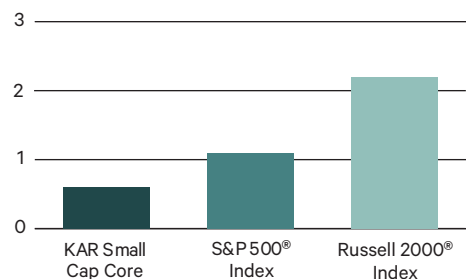


In our view, a higher interest coverage ratio means companies can more easily pay their debts in good times and bad.

\*S&P Quality Rankings are letter grades assigned to a company based on a variety of factors, chief among them is the consistency of earnings and dividend growth over the prior 10 years.

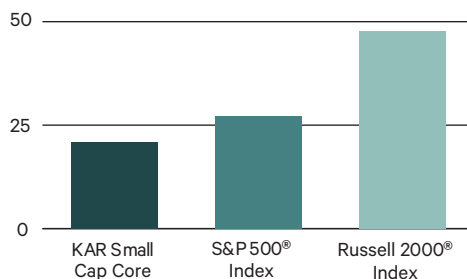
Data as of March 31, 2026. Source: FactSet Research Systems and BNY Mellon. Other principal consultant firms may use different algorithms to calculate selected statistics. Estimates are based on certain assumptions and historical information. To the extent actual performance results are shown in comparison to an index, the index is not actively managed and does not reflect the deduction of any investment management or other fees and expenses. Indices are not available for direct investment. This information is being provided by Kayne Anderson Rudnick Investment Management, LLC (“KAR”) for illustrative purposes only. This material is deemed supplemental and complements the performance and disclosure presented on the last page. **Past performance is no guarantee of future results.**

**DEBT**  
Debt/EBITDA\*



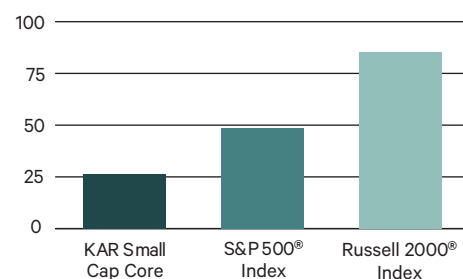
We find less debt translates to more free cash flow to fund future growth.

**VALUE**  
Trailing 12-Month Price-to-Earnings Ratio



In our experience, stocks with lower P/E ratios trade at a discount and have room to grow.

**VOLATILITY OF EARNINGS**  
Earnings Variance for the Past 10 Years



We believe lower variance indicates companies have more predictable earnings over time.

\*KAR utilizes the interquartile method when calculating Debt/EBITDA. The interquartile method excludes outliers from an aggregate statistic such as weighted average. The interquartile method does not assume that data from the top or bottom of the distribution are outliers—only the extreme ends are excluded—and that it can be applied consistently as a quantitative method for most fundamental characteristics. Debt/EBITDA utilizes net debt for the calculation. Data as of March 31, 2026. Source: FactSet Research Systems and BNY Mellon. Other principal consultant firms may use different algorithms to calculate selected statistics. Estimates are based on certain assumptions and historical information. To the extent actual performance results are shown in comparison to an index, the index is not actively managed and does not reflect the deduction of any investment management or other fees and expenses. Indices are not available for direct investment. This information is being provided by Kayne Anderson Rudnick Investment Management, LLC (“KAR”) for illustrative purposes only. This material is deemed supplemental and complements the performance and disclosure presented on the last page. **Past performance is no guarantee of future results.**

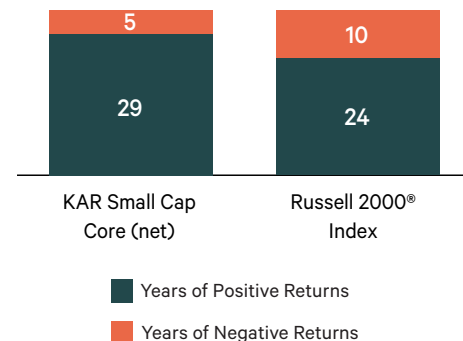
## Managing Risk to Keep Investors on Course

We believe careful risk management is an important contributor to how the KAR Small Cap Core Portfolio has generated investment returns that have exceeded its benchmark. The small-cap equity asset class is known for its potential to deliver excess returns over large-cap stocks, but often with more risk. Because of our focus on high quality, we find the risk profile of the KAR Small Cap Core Portfolio is closer to that of the S&P 500 Index of U.S. large-cap companies than the Russell 2000 Index of U.S. small-cap companies.

Investors often describe risk as the potential to lose money. The KAR Small Cap Core Portfolio, since its inception in 1992, has had more calendar years of positive returns and fewer calendar years of negative returns when compared to the Russell 2000 Index, as evidenced in the chart below. Further, during the four calendar-year periods that the KAR Small Cap Core Portfolio experienced losses, the strategy outperformed the Russell 2000 Index.

	Beta	Standard Deviation
KAR Small Cap Core (gross)	0.70	15.50
KAR Small Cap Core (net)	0.70	15.50
S&P 500® Index	0.62	14.60
Russell 2000® Index	1.00	19.31

Lower beta indicates less volatility than the market as a whole. Lower standard deviations indicate more consistent returns over time.



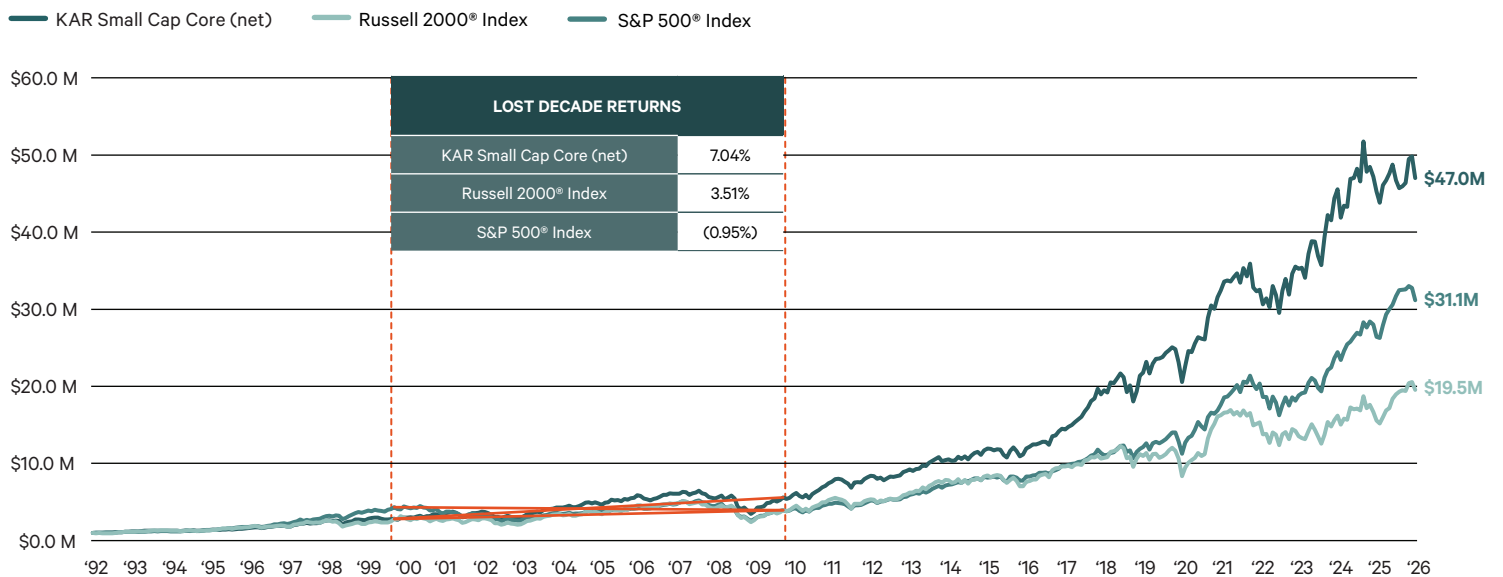
Data presented is since the inception of the KAR Small Cap Core strategy, April 1, 1992 through March 31, 2026. Source: FactSet Research Systems. Please see additional disclosures at the bottom of the next page. **Past performance is no guarantee of future results.**



A concept in behavioral finance known as prospect theory tells us that investors feel the impact of negative returns more deeply than positive ones. At KAR, we strive to remain defensive even in the worst markets.

## Unique Performer, Strong Performance

In the end, investors want an investment strategy that delivers returns, through bull and bear markets, recessions and recoveries. To get a sense of how the KAR Small Cap Core strategy has achieved outperformance over the long term, consider the growth of \$1 million since 1992. Through bull runs and despite bear markets, dollars invested in the KAR Small Cap Core strategy (net of fees) have grown to almost double of those within the Russell 2000 Index and S&P 500 Index since 1992.



“Lost Decade” reflects time period between January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2009. Returns are annualized. The “Lost Decade” refers to the period in which the S&P 500 Index posted its first negative “named” decade ever (i.e., 1960s, 1970s) since inception of the index back in 1926.

Chart reflects cumulative returns since the inception of the KAR Small Cap Core strategy, April 1, 1992 through March 31, 2026. The performance figures presented above are final and are net of fees unless otherwise specified. Net of fees returns reflect the payment of investment management fees and in some instances, other fees and expenses. KAR’s investment management fees are described in KAR’s Form ADV, Part 2A. Fees presented on the Disclosure page could vary from the assumed fee in the net-of-fee calculation, as actual fees paid by a particular client account differ depending on a variety of factors including, but not limited to, business unit and size of mandate. The fee used on the Disclosure page utilizes an assumed maximum fee across the firm’s business units, which is further detailed on that page. All periods less than one year are total returns for the noted timeframe and are not annualized. All rates of return include reinvested dividends and other earnings. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance data shown. This material is deemed supplemental and complements the performance and disclosure presented on the last page and included in KAR’s strategy fact sheets available on kayne.com. To the extent actual performance results are shown in comparison to an index, the index is not actively managed and does not reflect the deduction of any investment management or other fees and expenses. Indices are not available for direct investment. This information is being provided by Kayne Anderson Rudnick Investment Management, LLC (“KAR”) for illustrative purposes only.” Source: FactSet Research Systems. Returns may be affected by currency fluctuations. **Past performance is no guarantee of future results.**

### ANNUALIZED RETURNS

	1 Year	5 Years	10 Years
KAR Small Cap Core (gross)	5.12%	9.11%	16.14%
KAR Small Cap Core (net)	3.76%	7.71%	14.66%
Russell 2000® Index	25.72%	3.77%	9.88%

## Disclosure

Year	Composite Gross Return (%)	Composite Net Return (%)	Russell 2000® Index Return (%)	Composite 3-Yr Std Dev (%)	Benchmark 3-Yr Std Dev (%)	Number of Accounts	Internal Dispersion (%)	Composite Assets (\$ Millions)	Firm Assets (\$ Millions)
2015	2.37	1.05	(4.41)	11.28	14.16	157	0.23	1,048	8,095
2016	19.10	17.59	21.31	12.50	15.99	209	0.49	1,303	9,989
2017	36.61	34.89	14.65	11.59	14.11	392	0.70	2,091	14,609
2018	(0.83)	(2.12)	(11.01)	14.03	16.01	556	0.45	2,619	17,840
2019	40.88	39.11	25.52	14.77	15.93	718	0.89	3,692	25,685
2020	23.17	21.60	19.96	19.35	25.63	894	1.02	4,774	39,582
2021	19.24	17.72	14.82	16.58	23.68	1,072	1.45	5,285	47,269
2022	(9.92)	(11.10)	(20.44)	19.05	26.39	1,182	0.64	4,532	33,531
2023	33.95	32.26	16.93	17.60	21.41	1,425	0.61	6,402	41,186
2024	14.77	13.30	11.54	20.22	23.63	1,762	0.44	7,385	45,494

The Russell 2000® Index is a trademark/service mark of Frank Russell Company. Russell® is a trademark of Frank Russell Company.

KAR (as defined below) claims compliance with the Global Investment Performance Standards (GIPS®) and has prepared and presented this report in compliance with the GIPS® standards. KAR has been independently verified for the period from January 1, 1999 through December 31, 2024.

A firm that claims compliance with the GIPS standards must establish policies and procedures for complying with all the applicable requirements of the GIPS standards. Verification provides assurance on whether the firm’s policies and procedures related to composite, as well as the calculation, presentation, and distribution of performance, have been designed in compliance with the GIPS standards and have been implemented on a firm-wide basis.

The Small Cap Core Composite has had a performance examination for the period from January 1, 1999 through December 31, 2024. The verification and performance examination reports are available upon request.

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Kayne Anderson Rudnick Investment Management, LLC (“KAR”), a wholly owned subsidiary of Virtus Investment Partners, Inc., is a registered investment advisor under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940. Registration of an Investment Advisor does not imply any level of skill or training. KAR manages a variety of equity and fixed-income strategies focusing exclusively on securities the firm defines as high quality.

The composite includes all discretionary institutional and pooled Small Cap Core Portfolios. Small Cap Core Portfolios are invested in equity securities with market capitalizations consistent with the Russell 2000® Index, that have market control, rising free cash flow, shareholder-oriented management, strong consistent profit growth and low-debt balance sheets. For comparison purposes, the composite is measured against the Russell 2000® Index. The Russell 2000® Index is a market capitalization-weighted index of the 2,000 smallest companies in the Russell Universe, which comprises the 3,000 largest U.S. companies. The index is calculated on a total-return basis with dividends reinvested. Benchmark

returns are not covered by the report of the independent verifiers. The inception date of the composite is April 1992. The composite was created in April 1992. Policies for valuing investments, calculating performance, and preparing GIPS Reports are available upon request. The firm’s list of composite descriptions, list of broad distribution pooled fund and the list of limited distribution pooled funds descriptions are available upon request.

The model management fee used for the net returns in this table is 1.30% for all periods presented. The standard Institutional management fee schedule currently in effect is as follows: 0.90% for the first \$25 million; 0.80% on the next \$25 million; 0.70% on the balance. The maximum Wealth Advisory Services Fee in effect is 1.30% for all assets, which breaks out as follows: 1.00% for the first \$3 million; 0.80% on the next \$2 million; 0.70% on the next \$5 million; 0.60% on the balance; with an additional 0.30% for any assets invested in separately managed accounts strategies. The standard investment advisory fee schedule currently in effect for clients not engaging in Wealth Advisory Services is 1.00%. Actual management fees charged may vary depending on applicable fee schedules and portfolio size, among other things. Additional information may be found in Part 2A of Form ADV, which is available on request. The performance information is supplied for reference. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Results will vary among accounts. The U.S. dollar is the currency used to express performance. Returns are presented net of transaction fees and include the reinvestment of all income. Gross returns will be reduced by investment management fees and other expenses that may be incurred in the management of the account. Model net returns have been calculated by deducting 1/12th of the highest tier of the standard management fee schedule in effect for the respective period from the gross composite returns on a monthly basis.

Internal dispersion is calculated using the asset-weighted standard deviation of annual gross returns for accounts in the composite for the entire year. For those years when less than five accounts were included for the full year, no dispersion measure is presented. The three-year annualized ex-post standard deviation measures the variability of the composite (using gross returns) and the benchmark for the 36-month period.

The S&P 500 Index is a market capitalization-weighted index which includes 500 of the largest companies in leading industries of the U.S. economy. The indexes are calculated on a total return basis with dividends reinvested. The indexes are unmanaged, their returns do not reflect any fees, expenses, or sales charges, and they are not available for direct investment. EBITDA, or earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and

amortization, is a measure of a company’s overall financial performance and is used as an alternative to net income in some circumstances. Beta: A quantitative measure of the volatility, or systematic risk, of a security or a portfolio in comparison to the market as a whole. Standard Deviation: Measures variability of returns around the average return for an investment portfolio. Higher standard deviation suggests greater risk.