How to Avoid the Worst Sector ETFs

Question: Why are there so many ETFs?

Answer: ETF providers tend to make lots of money on each ETF so they create more products to sell.

The large number of ETFs has little to do with serving your best interests. Below are three red flags you can use to avoid the worst ETFs:

1. Inadequate Liquidity

This issue is the easiest to avoid, and our advice is simple. Avoid all ETFs with less than $100 million in assets. Low levels of liquidity can lead to a discrepancy between the price of the ETF and the underlying value of the securities it holds. Plus, low asset levels tend to mean lower volume in the ETF and larger bid-ask spreads.

2. High Fees

ETFs should be cheap, but not all of them are. The first step here is to know what is cheap and expensive.

To ensure you are paying average or below average fees, invest only in ETFs with total annual costs below 0.48%, which is the average total annual costs of the 229 U.S. equity Sector ETFs we cover. The weighted average is lower at 0.26%, which highlights how investors tend to put their money in ETFs with low fees.

Figure 1 shows Invesco KBW High Dividend Yield ETF (KBWD) is the most expensive sector ETF and Schwab U.S. REIT ETF (SCHH) is the least expensive. Invesco provides one of the most expensive ETFs while Fidelity ETFs are among the cheapest.

Figure 1: 5 Most and Least Expensive Sector ETFs

Ticker	Name	Sector	Total Annual Cost
	Most Expensive		
KBWD	Invesco KBW High Dividend Yield Financial ETF	Financials	2.73%
HECO	Strategy Shares EcoLogical Strategy ETF	Industrials	1.09%
KOIN	Innovation Shares NextGen Protocol ETF	Technology	1.06%
UTES	Virtus Reaves Utilities ETF	Utilities	1.06%
BOON	NYSE Pickens Oil Response ETF	Energy	0.94%
	Least Expensive		
SCHH	Schwab U.S. REIT ETF	Real Estate	0.08%
USRT	iShares U.S. REIT ETF	Real Estate	0.09%
FSTA	Fidelity MSCI Consumer Staples Index ETF	Consumer Non-cyclicals	0.09%
FNCL	Fidelity MSCI Financials Index ETF	Financials	0.09%
FDIS	Fidelity MSCI Consumer Discretionary Index ETF	Consumer Cyclicals	0.09%

Sources: New Constructs, LLC and company filings

Investors need not pay high fees for quality holdings.[1] Fidelity MSCI Consumer Staples Index ETF (FSTA) is the best ranked sector ETF in Figure 1. FSTA's Neutral Portfolio Management rating and 0.09% total annual cost

[1] This paper compares our analytics on a mega cap company to other major providers. The Appendix details exactly how we stack up.

earns it a Very Attractive rating.[2] Invesco KBW Bank ETF (KBWB) is the best ranked sector ETF overall. KBWB's Attractive Portfolio Management rating and 0.39% total annual cost also earns it a Very Attractive rating.

On the other hand, Schwab U.S. REIT ETF (SCHH) holds poor stocks and earns our Unattractive, yet has low total annual costs of 0.08%. No matter how cheap an ETF, if it holds bad stocks, its performance will be bad. The quality of an ETFs holdings matters more than its price.

3. Poor Holdings

Avoiding poor holdings is by far the hardest part of avoiding bad ETFs, but it is also the most important because an ETF's performance is determined more by its holdings than its costs. Figure 2 shows the ETFs within each sector with the worst holdings or portfolio management ratings.

Figure 2: Sector ETFs with the Worst Holdings

Ticker	Name	Sector	Portfolio Management Rating
XLB	State Street Materials Select Sector SPDR	Basic Materials	Unattractive
PBS	Invesco Dynamic Media ETF	Consumer Cyclicals	Unattractive
PBJ	Invesco Dynamic Food & Beverage ETF	Consumer Non-cyclicals	Unattractive
OIH	VanEck Vectors Oil Services ETF	Energy	Unattractive
KBWD	Invesco KBW High Dividend Yield Financial ETF	Financials	Unattractive
FBT	First Trust NYSE Arca Biotechnology Index Fund	Healthcare	Unattractive
IFRA	iShares U.S. Infrastructure ETF	Industrials	Unattractive
PPTY	U.S. Diversified Real Estate ETF	Real Estate	Unattractive
XITK	State Street SPDR FactSet Innovative Technology	Technology	Unattractive
XTL	State Street SPDR S&P Telecom ETF	Telecom Services	Unattractive
XLU	State Street Utilities Select Sector SPDR	Utilities	Very Unattractive

Sources: New Constructs, LLC and company filings

State Street and Invesco appear more often than any other providers in Figure 2, which means that they offer the most ETFs with the worst holdings.

State Street Utilities Select Sector SPDR (XLU) is the worst rated ETF in Figure 2. State Street Materials Select Sector SDPR (XLB), State Street SPDR FactSet Innovative Technology (XITK), VanEck Vectors Oil Services (OIH), First Trust NYSE Arca Biotechnology Index (FBT), and U.S. Diversified Real Estate (PPTY) also earn a Very Unattractive predictive overall rating, which means not only do they hold poor stocks, they charge high total annual costs.

Our overall ratings on ETFs are on our stock ratings of their holdings and the total annual costs of investing in the ETF.

The Danger Within

Buying an ETF without analyzing its holdings is like buying a stock without analyzing its business and finances. Put another way, research on ETF holdings is necessary due diligence because an ETF's performance is only as good as its holdings' performance. Don't just take our word for it, see what Barron's says on this matter.

PERFORMANCE OF ETFs HOLDINGs = PERFORMANCE OF ETF

[2] Harvard Business School features the powerful impact of our research automation technology in the case New Constructs: Disrupting Fundamental Analysis with Robo-Analysts.

Analyzing each holding within funds is no small task. Our Robo-Analyst technology enables us to perform this diligence with scale and provide the research needed to fulfill the fiduciary duty of care. More of the biggest names in the financial industry (see At BlackRock, Machines Are Rising Over Managers to Pick Stocks) are now embracing technology to leverage machines in the investment research process. Technology may be the only solution to the dual mandate for research: cut costs and fulfill the fiduciary duty of care. Investors, clients, advisors and analysts deserve the latest in technology to get the diligence required to make prudent investment decisions.

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3. **Transparent** - Advisors should be able to show how the analysis was performed and the data behind it.
4. **Relevant** - Empirical evidence must provide tangible, quantifiable correlation to stock, ETF or mutual fund performance.

Value Investing 2.0: Diligence Matters: Technology is Key to Value Investing With Scale

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