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## Volatility Index Options

By Richard Croft Croft Capital Management



Mr. Croft authors a regular Market Commentary column on E\*TRADE that appears each Tuesday. He is also a regular contributor to the MoneyLetter, where his articles focus on utilizing individual stocks, mutual funds and exchange traded funds within a portfolio model. Mr. Croft is a global portfolio manager who focuses on risk adjusted performance. He believes it is not just about return, it is about how that return was achieved.

Most recently, Mr. Croft co-authored a Canadian best seller on portfolio building entitled *Protect Your Nest Egg*. This was Mr. Croft's ninth book.

The Chicago Board Options Exchange has listed options on the Volatility Index (symbol VIX). The VIX, as you probably know, measures the volatility being implied by a basket of near-the-money options on the S&P 500 index. What's particularly interesting about the VIX, is the fact that it is negatively correlated to the S&P 500 index. Correlations between securities range from -1.0 - perfect negative correlation to +1.0 perfect positive correlation, the VIX has a -0.78 correlation to the S&P 500 index. In terms of portfolio management, an asset class that has negative correlation

with equities, can when introduced into the portfolio, actually reduce overall portfolio volatility and often enhance returns.

The other interesting characteristic about VIX as an asset class, is that it is very volatile. The VIX has a volatility in the 60% to 80% range. What that means in terms of portfolio management, is that you do not need very much of the VIX to offset some of the risks associated with the S&P 500 index.

Other factors that make VIX interesting and at the same time, add to its complexity, is the fact that VIX is a range bound asset class. Volatility can never go to zero, and typically never trades for long periods below 10%.

Similarly, the VIX will never exceed 60% for long periods of time, and will not likely ever trade above 40%. Historically, going back twenty years, the VIX index has eclipsed 60% on only six occasions. All of these spikes were caused by major sell-offs in the S&P 500 index, and on each occasion when volatility spiked, it quickly dissipated. The classic example was the October 1987 stock market crash when volatility spike above 100%, but quickly dissipated to 40% within two days.

Because of these inherent characteristics, options on the VIX become skewed. For example, the VIX closed last Friday at 12.12 (representing 12.12% implied volatility). Typically we

would expect the 12.50 calls and puts to trade at about the same value. The puts would be in-the-money and the calls would be out-of-the-money.

However, since we know that VIX will not likely fall below 10, the price of the VIX 12.50 puts reflect that. So with the VIX May 12.50 calls trading at \$1.50 to \$1.60, the puts, despite the fact they are in-the-money, were trading between 80 cents and 90 cents.

Keeping with the unique characteristics of the underlying asset, you would expect VIX to spike should stock prices fall sharply.

However, because of the skew that says volatility quickly dissipates, traders will know that when the volatility rises to 40%, it will not likely stay there for long. And again, the price of the calls will reflect that.

In some cases, after a spike in volatility, calls that are in-the-money will actually trade for less than their intrinsic value. For example, if the VIX spiked to 40, the intrinsic value of the VIX May 12.50 calls would be \$27.50. However, because of the skewing, I would think the VIX May 12.50 calls might only trade at \$15.00 to \$20.00. VIX options are European cash settled, which means that the options can only be exercised or assigned on the expiration day and settlement will be made in cash for the difference between the strike price of the options and the closing value of the VIX.

That brings up the issue of time to expiration as a factor in the price of the option. Again because of the unique characteristics of this security, a shorter time horizon might actually favor the trader who

is long in-the-money options. The closer to expiry, the more likely in-the-money options will reflect their intrinsic value. Conversely, the longer the time to expiration, the more likely that in-the-money options will trade at a substantial discount to their intrinsic value.

Another point to consider when trading VIX options. The actual expiry date is not the normal third Friday of the expiration month. For VIX options, based on material provided by the CBOE, expiry is "the Wednesday that is thirty days prior to the third Friday of the calendar month immediately following the expiring month."

To summarize, VIX is an interesting asset class, and VIX options are an interesting way to play this asset class. But beware of the unique characteristics of the asset class, and the impact those characteristics will have on the way the options are valued.

But beware of the unique characteristics of the asset class, and the impact those characteristics will have on the way the options are valued.

## Watching Your Options

By Richard Croft Croft Capital Management

Mr. S is an options trader. He bought 10 Google October 460 puts in September. On the last day of trading Mr. S tried to sell (i.e. close) his Google puts at a limit price. He was never able to sell at the limit price, and simply decided to let the options expire worthless.

Most investors believe that when they buy a call or a put option, the most they can lose is the cost of the option. Limited risk being one of the advantages of trading options on volatile stocks like Google. However, the limited risk thesis only works if the trader is willing to exit the position prior to expiration. If the option is exercised, the trader ends up either being long or short the underlying stock, and that means the trader now assumes the same risk as any other

stockholder (i.e. the stock could decline to zero or rise to infinity).

This issue is critical because traders all too often, take their eye off the option ball, and end up with a position that exposes them to far greater risks than were initially intended. In the case of Mr. S, his decision to let the option expire left him vulnerable to "automatic exercise."

In the US the Options Clearing Corporation (OCC) has provisions for the automatic exercise of certain in-the-money options at expiration. For the record, options expire on the Saturday following the third Friday (i.e. the last trading day) of the expiration month, so even if the option ceases to trade at the end of trading on Friday, it still exists as a legal entity until the next day.

On the Saturday following the third Friday, the OCC implements a procedure referred to as "exercise by exception."

What this means is that the OCC will automatically exercise any expiring equity call or put in a customer account that is 5 cents (it used to be 25 cents in the money, but was reduced prior to the October expiration to 5 cents) or more in-the-money, and an index option that is 1 cent or more in-the-money.

In our example, Google closed at US \$459.67 on Friday afternoon, and so Mr. S's options were automatically exercised by the OCC on his behalf. On Monday morning, Mr. S was surprised to learn that he was, because of the exercise, short 1,000 shares of Google at US\$460 per share.

Of course that was about the time that Google announced their earnings, and the purchase of

YouTube.com. As traders digested the news over the week-end, Google shares jumped sharply on the following Monday, and Mr. S was forced to buy back his short position at US \$78 per

share, for a loss of US \$18,000. That is of course, in addition to any loss that occurred on the Google puts.

Clearly, Mr. Smith should not have had to go through this aggravation. He could have requested his broker not to exercise the option, regardless whether it was in the money or not. He also could have simply closed out the position through a sale prior to the close of trading.

This situation was an interesting case study about the importance of overseeing your option trading from inception to expiration.

There are also examples of options that expired out of the money but with after hours trading ended up in-the-money. In the Google example, let's suppose that the stock traded higher in after hours trading to say, US \$462 per share. At that price, traders who were long say the October 460 calls that expired worthless based on the 4:00 pm closing price of US \$459.67, would now have some intrinsic value. Would the call buyer have had their options exercised automatically?

Basically the answer is no, because automatic exercise is driven by the value of the underlying stock at the 4:00 pm close of trading. However, traders can request that options be exercised even if the stock closed at a 4:00 pm price that was out of the money. Each brokerage firm has what is known as "cut off" times to send exercise instructions to the OCC. Investment Executives who advise clients on options should be clear on the exercise procedure and their firm's appropriate cut off times.

## Timely Trades February 1, 2009

By Steve Palmquist

### NASDAQ Outlook & Key Trading Levels:

The market dropped back into the recent narrow trading range during Thursday's session. The volume on the move was below average. On Friday, the market moved further down into the recent base on increasing volume. The price pattern's failure to hold Wednesday's base breakout is a sign of indecision. The volume pattern is also showing indecision, we have seen two accumulation days and two distribution days in the last two weeks.

Since neither the recent price or volume patterns are showing any conviction, I remain cautious. The market does whatever it wants to do, we cannot influence it or control it. Traders need to react to different market conditions by adjusting the patterns they trade, the number of trading positions used, and position sizes. When both the price and volume patterns of the market are showing indecision, I react by trading lightly and using small position sizes. When the market shows some conviction, and picks a direction, I will

react by using more trading positions and increasing position sizes. Narrow trading ranges are typically followed by strong moves, this is a time to be getting the long and short watch lists ready.

The trading plan was to close any open longs if the market fell back into the narrow trading range. I followed the plan and closed longs on Thursday. When the market continued further into the base during Friday's session on above average volume, I looked at a couple of shorts. As noted in the last Letter one day does not make a trend, and base breakouts sometimes fail; this is why I just took a few longs until the market proved the move was real. Many of the longs that triggered on Wednesday were strong enough to close out around or above break even; this is one of the advantages in trading individual stocks instead of just the indexes. I typically hold positions longer, but when the market moves through key levels I take action no matter how long I have been in a position.

Base breakouts typically run up a bit, then retrace to test the base, and then continue moving. Sometimes we see a failed breakout as we did this week. One of the keys to trading is to position yourself to profit when the market does the usual thing. This is why traders take a few test positions on base breakouts. If they always worked, we would go 'all in' instead of testing the waters. Taking a few positions on the breakout, and then adding more as the market proves itself, protects you from breakout failures. When the market makes its move there will be a lot more setups triggering and there will be more time to ride them, until then I want to protect profits by using small position sizes and just a few trading positions.

When the market is indecisive I use a pairs trading approach. I pick up a couple of strong long setups like accumulation patterns or flags that do not require triggers, and also a couple of strong short setups like distribution patterns or bear flags. Pairing strong long and short candidates can help to balance out the

minor fluctuations in the markets. Strong longs tend not to drop too much if the market moves down and, strong shorts tend to move quickly. The net effect can be small profits either way the market moves. I will look at picking pairing a few longs and a few shorts while the market remains between the 1440 and 1540 areas.

When the market is in a trading range, then by definition, most stocks are not triggering and running for long. There are a lot of 'pop and drops', and they come on both the long and short sides. In trading ranges most setups do not trigger on strong volume, so waiting for strong volume triggers will keep you mostly out of the market. I can't make money by waiting or endlessly analyzing things, I have to adapt to the market then pick the best strategy for the current conditions then manage risk.

I enter several paired long and shorts together. Most of the positions will show a small gain or loss as the market moves back and forth. A few will pop and move nicely. Since the profits come from just a few trades, I need to be holding several pairs to have a better chance to get one that pops. Pair trading rarely works well with just one pair, it takes several. Because of that I use smaller position sizes as another way to reduce risk in uncertain markets.

I enter paired long a short trades before the setups trigger. I am just buying or shorting the setup where it currently is, paying attention to the risk on each trade defined as the distance between my stop and the entry point, and the potential gain on each trade defined as the distance between the entry and a recent high/low or the upper/lower Bollinger band.

I like to pair bull and bear flags, accumulation and distribution patterns, or low volume pullbacks. I

do not pair longer term patterns like Cup and Handles or double tops/bottoms with shorter term patterns like flags and pullbacks for obvious reasons. I do not pair ETFs. There is no magic to picking the long and short candidates to pair. I look for strong long patterns and weak short patterns. The trick is to have several pairs, not just one or two, and to focus on managing risk.

Most of the pairs balance out for a small net gain or loss. A few pop strongly and yield profits. In a trending market it is easier to pick out good trades because the volume tells you which ones to take. In a trading range, or uncertain market, I pair them and let the market sort it out.

No strategy is perfect, but this is one of the better ones I have seen for uncertain markets. When the market picks a direction, then I close out either the long or short side of the pairs and ride the next trend.

If the market moves above the 1540 area I will close out any open shorts and just use long trading positions. The next resistance area for the market is from the descending trend line drawn through the highs of 11/04/08 and 01/06/09. This is currently in the 1616 area and dropping slightly every day. I will be taking profits on most longs as the market approaches this descending trend line. If the market breaks above this descending trend line, on above average volume, I will look at increasing the number of trading positions I am using.

When the market setups up like this I get emails asking, 'why would I would take profits when the market approaches the descending trend line, if the plan is to buy more when it breaks above it'. Trading is about risk management. The typical thing for the market to do at a trend line is to retrace or base. Clearly it does not always happen, but it does often enough that I am better off to take profits as noted above, when the market approaches resistance. If the market breaks above resistance, I have

my profits and can easily enter new positions to catch the next ride. If the market retraces at resistance, I have my profits and am not giving them back by holding on too long. I am happy either way. The worst thing is to hold weak positions, see the market retrace from resistance, and give back the recent profit.

If the market moves below the 1440 area I will close out any open longs and use just short trading positions. The next support area for the market is 1300, so I would be taking profits on shorts approaching the 1300 area.

There are more interesting ETF setups than we have seen recently. I am looking at increasing my exposure in my ETF account over the next two weeks if this keeps up. Gold, commodities, oil, and high yield bond funds are starting to look interesting. ETF trading is usually slower than trading stocks; there is no need to rush into all of these areas, but they are on the watch list and I will start taking small positions as the setups begin to work.

There are no risk free trades. I want to manage risk by looking at each setup and asking, 'what is the lowest risk way to enter this trade'? I then want to compare that risk to what my other choices are. I am not focused on one stock, I am looking to manage units of risk by looking at all available trades, the various entry techniques, and the potential risk to reward that each trade yields. I then take the best of what is available, within the constraints of the trading plan. I do not focus on watching for triggers to within the penny. I am looking at all the potential trades and then picking the ones that are best.

### **Long Trade Opportunities:**

Focus on Long setup's that hit the price trigger when the market is bouncing off support, breaking above resistance, or in a clear up trend. See information on Market conditions above to determine if longs are appropriate. Do not take long

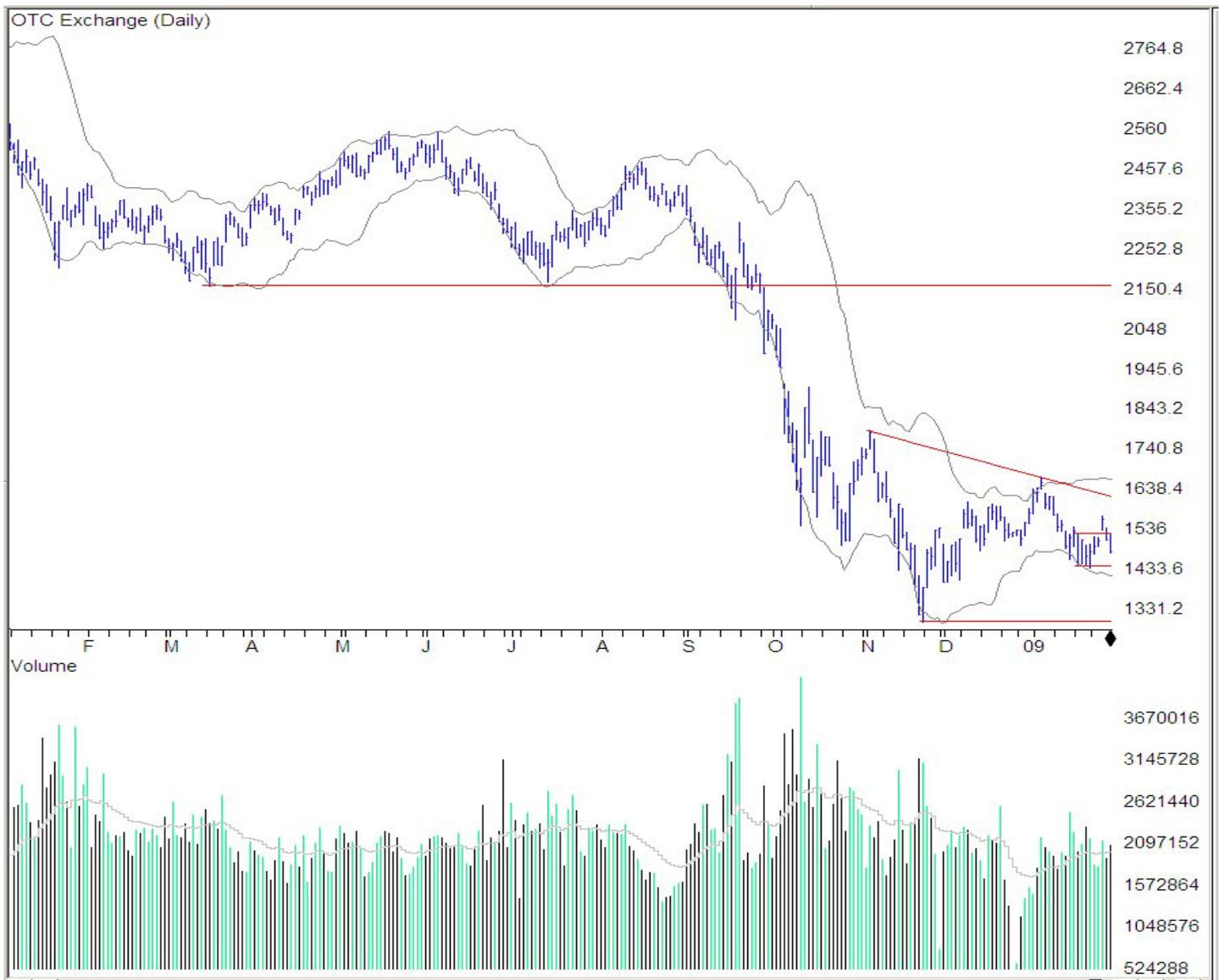


Figure 1 NASDAQ Market

positions just because they reach the price target, check volume and market conditions to determine if taking a position is appropriate. An Initial protective stop loss is typically placed just below the low of the pattern. If the set up does not trigger the next day, watch the pattern for a few more days. Interesting Long set ups include:

**CECO** on a move above 22.16. Double Bottom.

**FDO** on a move above 29.06. Base.

**PALM** on a move above 8.36. Flag.

### Shorting Opportunities:

Focus on Short setup's that hit the price trigger when the market is retracing from resistance, breaking below support, or in a down trend. See information on Market conditions above to determine if shorts are appropriate. Do not take positions just because they reach the price target, check volume and market conditions to determine if taking a position is appropriate. An Initial protective stop loss is typically placed just above the high of the pattern. If the set up does not trigger the next day, continue to watch the pattern for a few days.

Interesting Short set ups include:

**HPY** on a move below 8.78. Flag.

**TDY** on a move below 27.54. Base.

**BOOM** on a move below 11.94. Retrace.

### ETF Corner:

Exchange Traded Funds, REITs, and closed end funds may have low volatility and thus may provide opportunities for intermediate term holdings. Some are not strongly correlated to the market, and provide

interesting trading opportunities in poor market conditions. I generally trade these using trend lines for entry and exit points.

**FX** looks interesting for a small position on a move above the 111.77 area.

**SH** looks interesting for a small position on a move above the 84.51 area.

### Trader Tips:

You don't need to trade every day, let the set up's come to you and take the best ones. Trading weak or low volume set up's may just give you practice exercising stops. When the market is moving there are lots of good quality breakouts to choose from. If there are only a few breakouts and they tend to be failing, listen to the market's message and wait for better set up's.

Review your trades and learn from your mistakes. This is really the only way to get better in any business. Trading is an exercise in probabilities. Sometimes you do everything right and the trades still does not work out, that is just the way it is. If you have a system that wins more often than it loses and the average winner returns more than the average loser loses then over time things should work out.

Was it a strong set up? How was the volume behaving in the set up? Did you enter correctly or did you chase the stock more than 3% past the entry point? What was your price target? For price targets consider measured moves, the upper Bollinger band, or chart pattern resistance. What was your stop strategy?

Consider selecting stops just under the low of the set up pattern or in some cases the previous days low. Consider exiting the trade if it shows a large volume down bar, or the market bounces off resistance. In any case, have an exit plan.

How was the Market behaving when you took the trade? Where was NASDAQ support and resistance? Did the trade have "room to run"? Were you trading with the Market?

You don't have a profit until your back in cash. Too many traders have watched a set up trigger and started counting their money as they hoped it would keep going up, only to see the breakout reverse and the position turn into a loss. The exit strategies outlined above come from experience and are intended to minimize this problem. There are many profit taking approaches that work, just be sure you have one and are not hanging on indefinitely.

### Additional Information:

Steve Palmquist a full time trader who invests his own money in the market every day. He has shared trading techniques and systems at seminars across the country; presented at the Traders Expo, and published articles in Stocks & Commodities, Traders-Journal, The Opening Bell, and Working Money. Steve is the author of, "Money-Making Candlestick Patterns, Backtested for Proven Results", in which he shares backtesting research on popular candlestick patterns and shows what actually works, and what does not. This best selling book is available through [www.daisydogger.com](http://www.daisydogger.com).

Steve is the publisher of the, 'Timely Trades Letter' in which he shares his market analysis and specific trading setups for stocks and ETFs. To receive a sample of the 'Timely Trades Letter' send an email to [sample@daisydogger.com](mailto:sample@daisydogger.com). Steve's website: [www.daisydogger.com](http://www.daisydogger.com) provides additional trading information and market adaptive trading techniques.

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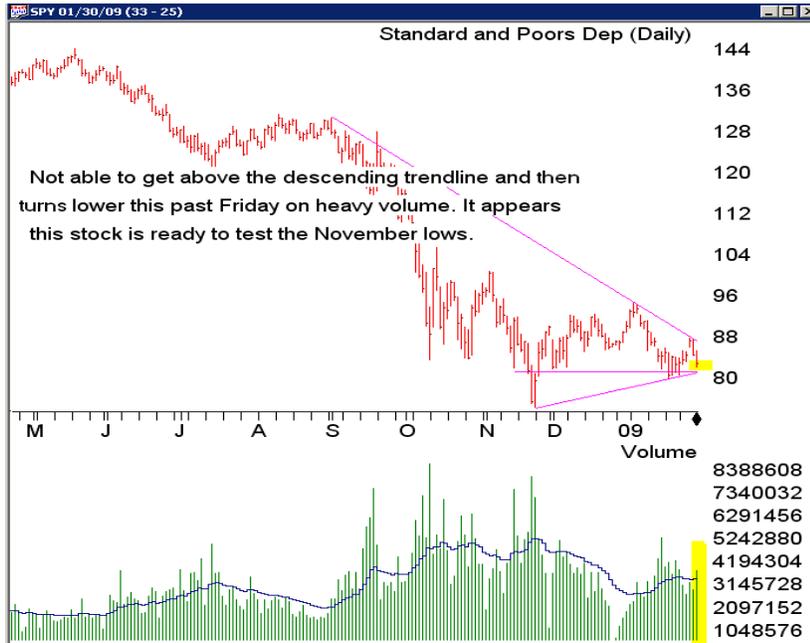
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# The Zanger Report February 1, 2009

Hello out there stock fans. The market continued to go lower on Friday this time due to poor GDP numbers that came out. The market

is now getting very close to breaking through its very bearish Descending Triangle pattern that has been building for a few months.

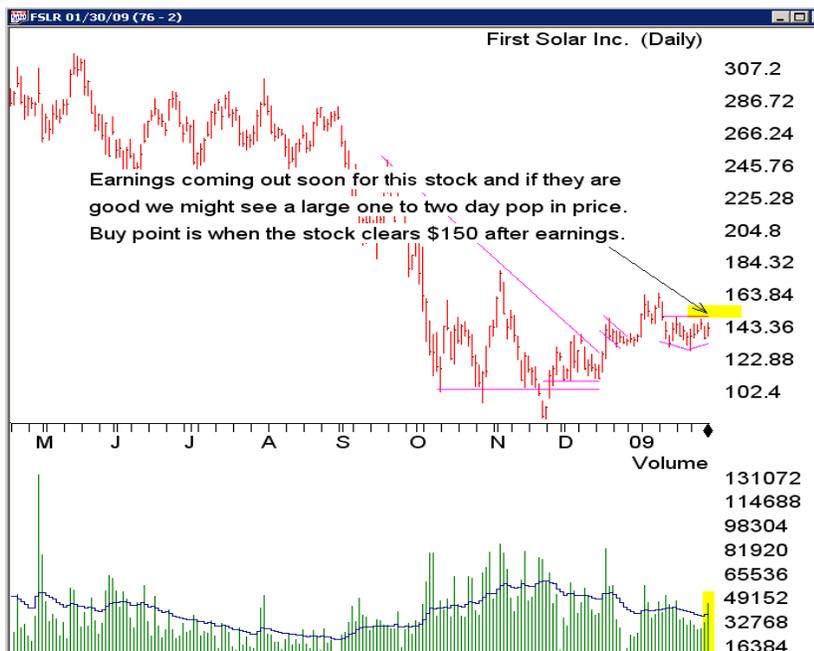
Let's see this pattern that is in control of the bearish trend that when it breaks, the market could plunge down hard once again.

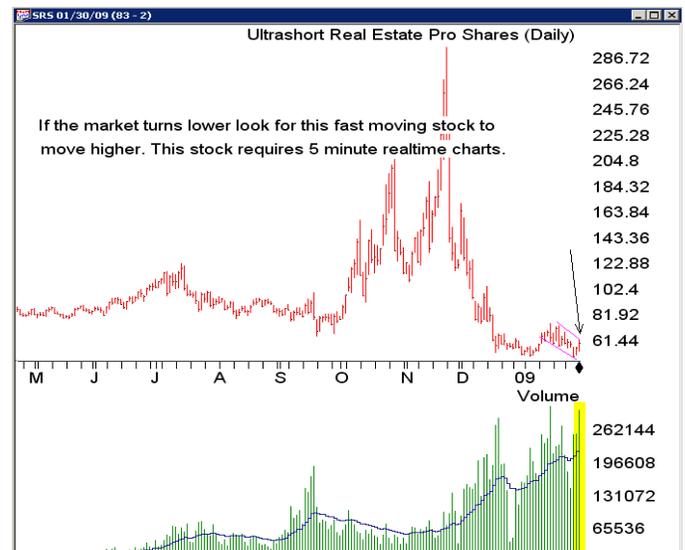
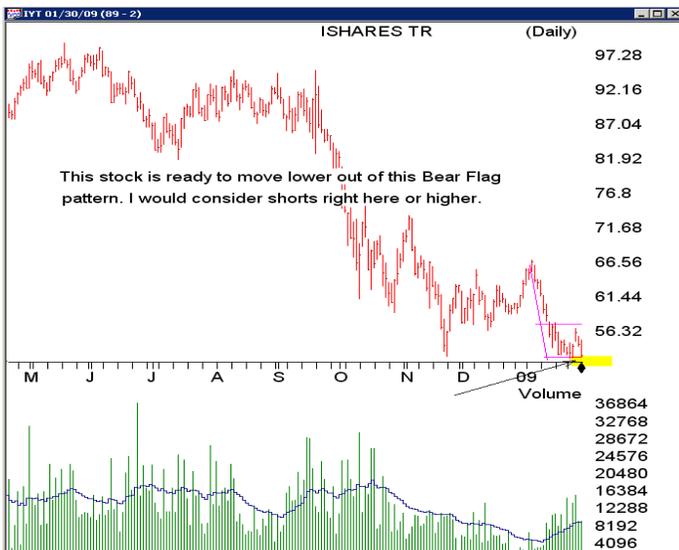
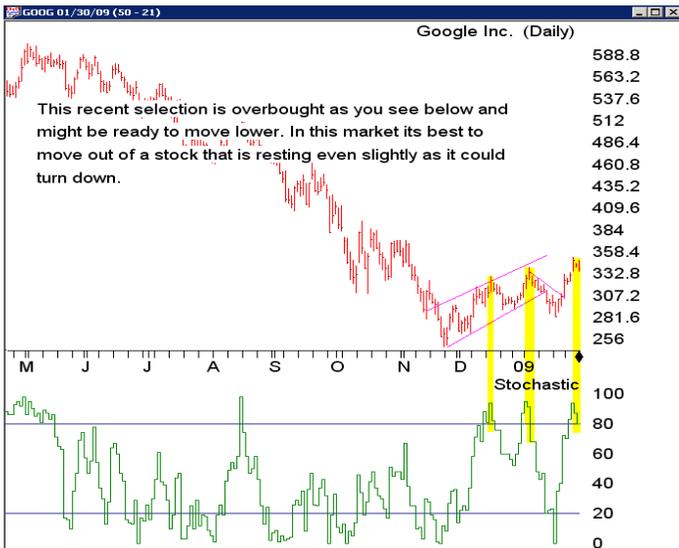
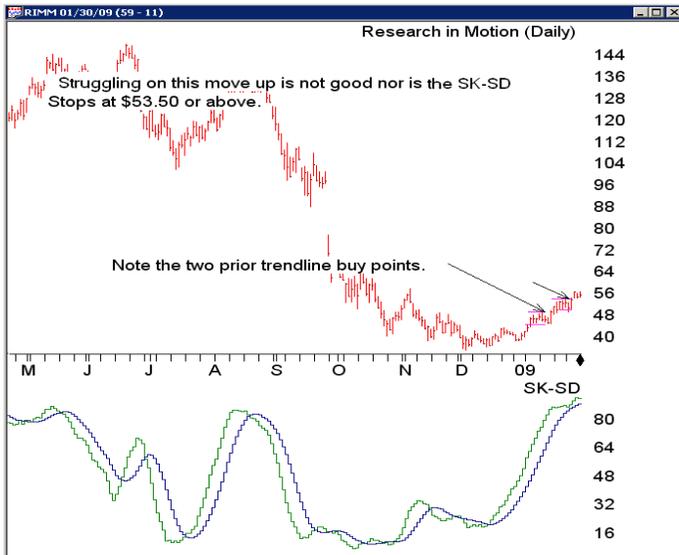


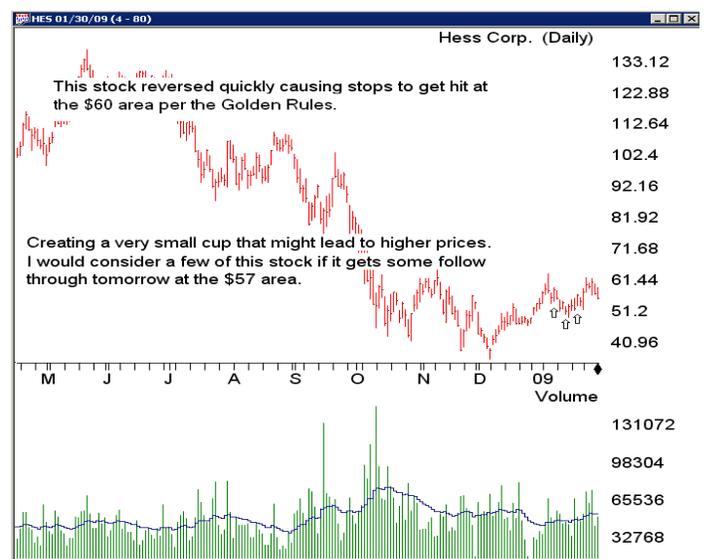
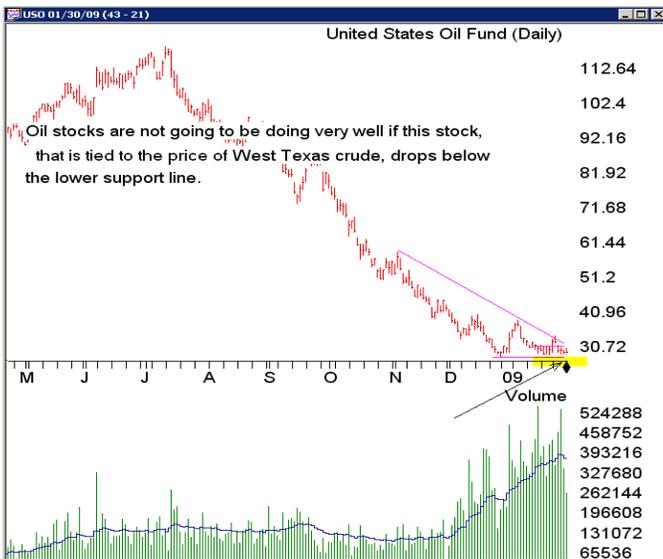
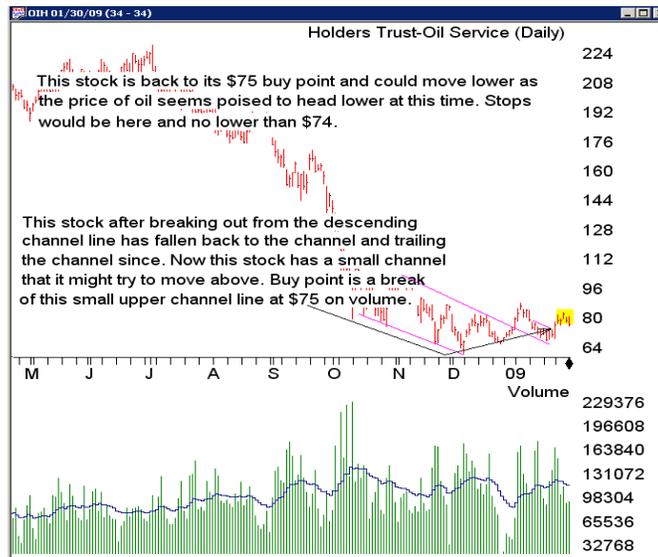
My short term trading oscillator closed the day on Friday at minus 15. This is close to a neutral reading and leaves the market plenty of room to move up or down.

Just one or two stocks are moving slightly from time to time from \$2 to \$10 while many stocks try to move up then roll over and move lower. Again this market is for the fast active trader

looking for short term gains up or down at this time. With that in mind let's see some potential movers.







**About the Author:**

Dan has been featured in FORTUNE MAGAZINE and appeared on a segment of EXTRA TV. He was also the weekly host of his own half-hour show on the Business Channel in LA and featured in numerous leading trade magazines such as Active Trader, TradersWorld, Forbes and Stocks & Commodities.

Dan has been an AIQ user since 1992 and uses AIQ's advanced list feature in charts for his daily stock screening. More info on Dan's newsletter can be found at Chartpattern.com.

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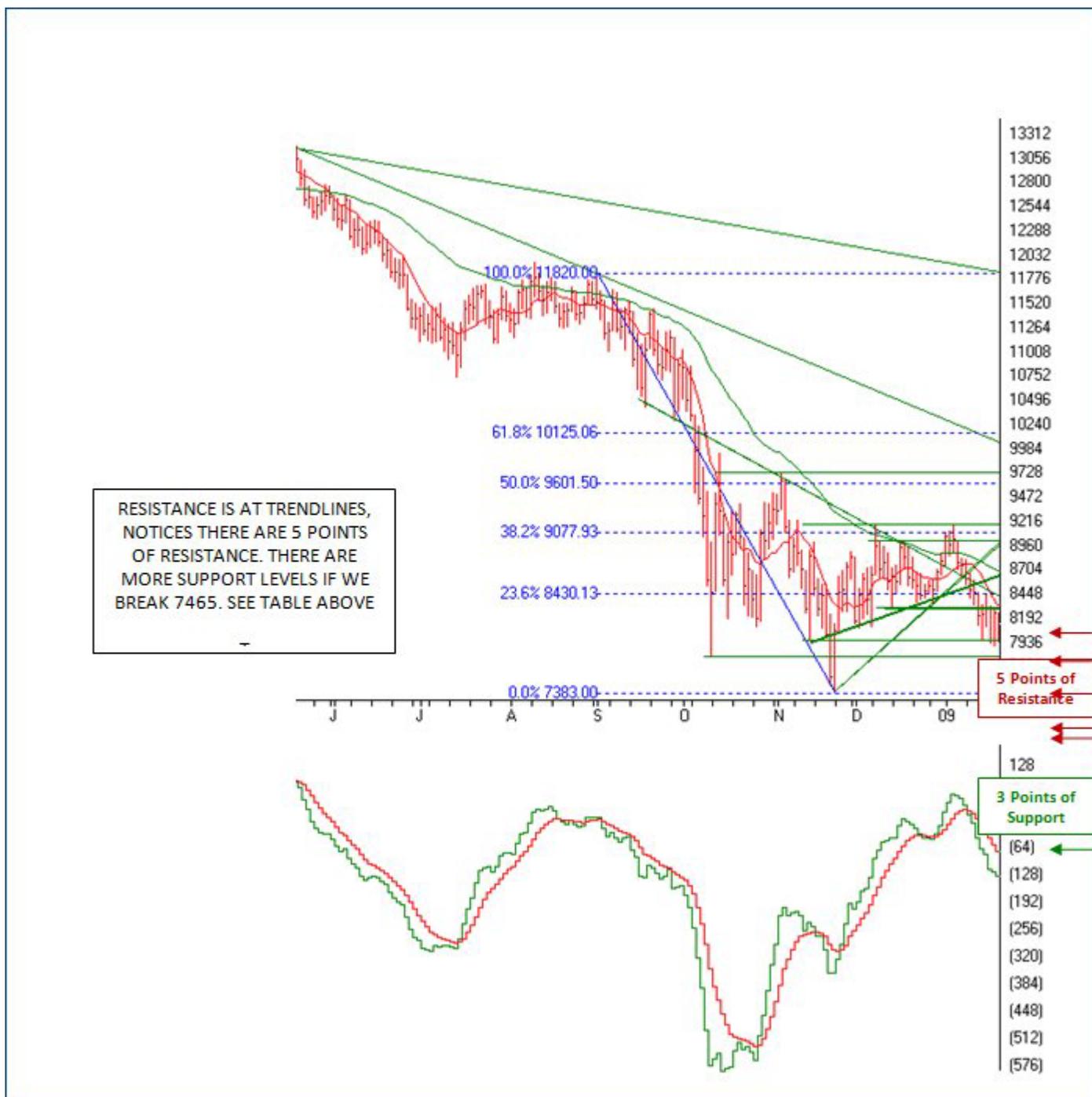
# Bartometer Market Outlook, February 1, 2009

By Joe Bartosiewicz, CFP, Devon Kay Financial Group

7,930-50 has been holding up as extreme support on the Dow Jones. This means that if we do break 7,880 either during the day with big volume or on a close we are then put in a situation where we should fall to the 7773 level then possibly the 7465

level or lower. So watch 7880 on a close or even during the day. It's not a guarantee that we will go to a new low, but the BEARS are winning this tug of war. Over the last few months I have been saying that Elliot Wave Theory is identifying this current

point in the market as wave 4 and that we are headed into Wave 5. This is very possible and if true, the Dow Jones could fall to the 6500-7400 level or possibly lower. **We are, however, very oversold technically and we can have an explosive rally at anytime.**



Support on the Dow Jones is at 7930-50, 7890, 7773, 7465, 7404, and 7183

Resistance is at 8274, 8430, 8621, 8795, and 8981

Momentum is still down. This is a short term trading resistance and support level guide. There is a lot of overhead resistance. Momentum is still down on the MACD.

Momentum is down see definition of MACD below.

## MARKET STRATEGIES

My market timing models are **MOSTLY NEUTRAL-SOMEWHAT BEARISH**

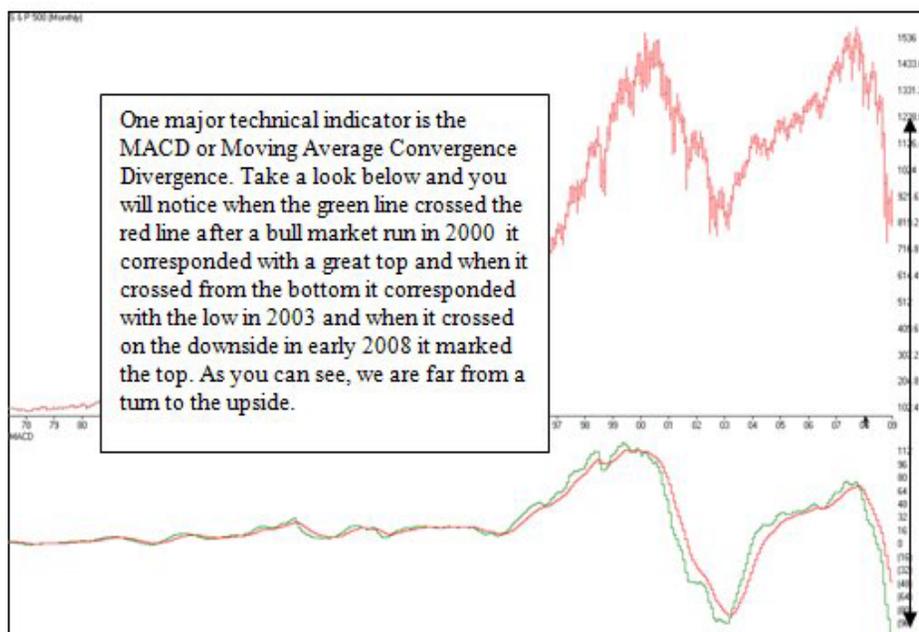
**BUT OPPORTUNISTIC ON THE LONG AND SHORT SIDE.**

*\*Technical Analysis is based on a study of historical price movements and past trend patterns. There is no assurance that these movements or trends can or will be duplicated in the near future. It logically follows that*

*historical precedent does not guarantee future results. Conclusions expressed in the Technical Analysis section are personal opinions: and may not be construed as recommendations to buy or sell anything.*

## S&P 500

**WE ARE STILL IN A TRADING MODE. SUPPORT ON THE S&P is at 804, 788, 769, 737 and 680**  
**RESISTANCE is at 849, 879, 918, 942, and 981**



The MACD Oscillator is computed as the difference between the MACD Price Phase Line and the MACD Signal Line. Or, another way of looking at it, the value of the oscillator is a measure of the vertical separation between the two lines on the MACD chart.

The MACD Oscillator is used as a very sensitive short-term price momentum indicator. When the Price Phase Line is above the Signal Line, price is moving up and the MACD Oscillator is positive (positive values are those values above the zero line). If the Price Phase Line is below the Signal Line, price is moving down and the MACD Oscillator is negative (below the zero line).

This oscillator is best used as an

early warning indicator. As long as it is moving in the same direction as price, momentum is increasing. When it reverses, it is an early warning that price movement has stalled and momentum is weakening.

**CAUTION IS STILL ADVISED. I AM OPPORTUNISTIC ON THE LONG AND SHORT SIDE.**

## NASDAQ

**THERE IS SUPPORT ON THE NASDAQ AT: 1440, 1397, 1299, 1252, 1193, and 1109**

**THERE IS RESISTANCE ON THE NASDAQ AT 1489, 1538, 1594, and 1660**

If we break down to new lows we are confirming my Elliot Wave Theory that we can go to new lows to possibly 6500-7400 on the Dow OR POSSIBLY LOWER. If we do hit a new low Elliot Wave Theory says there is a major rally after hitting the low sometime. We don't know when it can start that can be pretty substantial.

Volume on the NASDAQ decline has increased substantially. This means there is a lot of volume on when people are selling. This is a negative sign.

## TECHNICALS

My technicals have brought in some mixed results this week. These numbers are for the Dow Jones, and no other index.

- “ On Balance Volume % is negative
- “ Volume was strong yesterday on the downside. This is somewhat negative. It means people are still scared.
- “ The advanced Decline Line and oscillators are negative
- “ (MACD) has crossed to the downside (negative)
- “ Volume accumulation percentage was negative now it's neutral
- “ The Hi-Lo index is going down (negative).
- “ Point and Figure Charts is at a sell
- “ Money Flow is neutral
- “ Stochastics is slightly oversold (positive)
- “ OBV overall is flat neutral

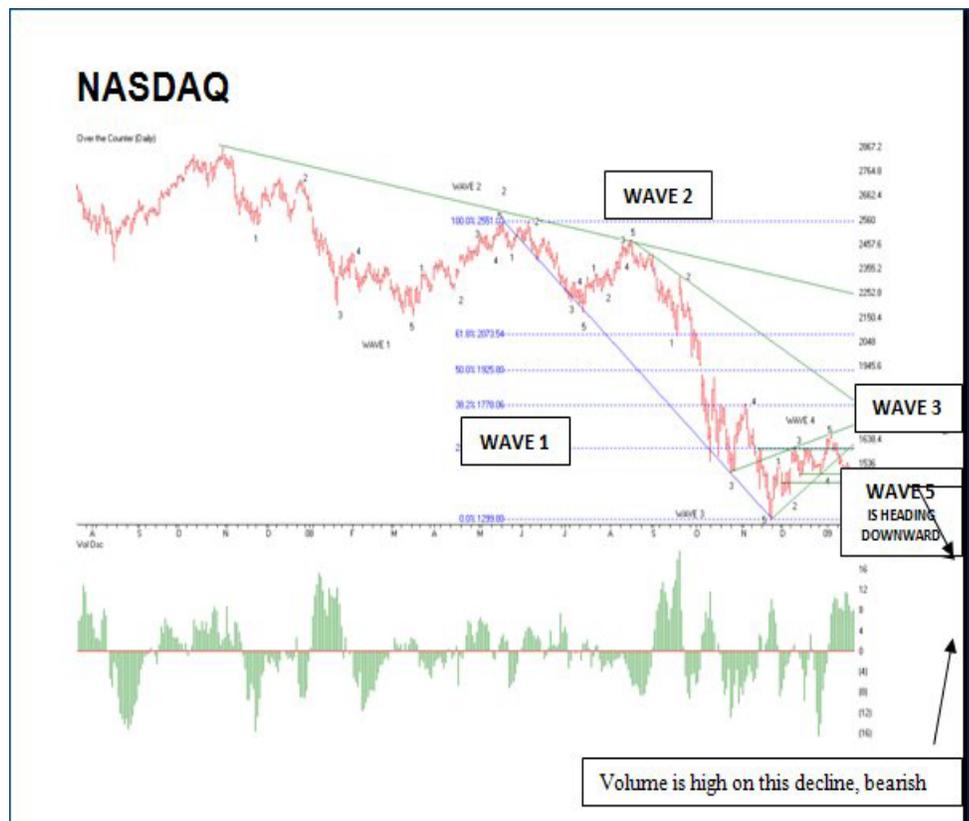
Overall, most technical information is mostly neutral to negative.

**Conclusion:**

My computer models went to SHORT TERM BEARISH. There is a distinct possibility we could hit a new low. This would confirm the FIFTH WAVE down on ELLIOT WAVE THEORY. We are however, oversold in the market, so there may be a chance for an oversold rally.

**If you would like more information or have not seen me in a while please call me for a review.**

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*Past performance cannot guarantee future results. Investing involves risk including the potential loss of principal. No investment strategy can guarantee a profit or protect against loss in periods of declining values. Please note that individual situations can vary. Therefore, the information presented in this letter should only be relied upon when coordinated with individual professional advice.*

*\*There is no guarantee that a diversified portfolio will outperform a non-diversified portfolio in any given market environment. No investment strategy, such as asset allocation, can guarantee a profit or protect against loss in periods of declining values.*

**Contact Information: Joe Bartosiewicz, CFP. Investment Advisor Representative 5 Colby Way, Avon, CT 06001 860-404-0408**

Joe is a Investment Advisor Representative, and a Registered Principal specializing in increasing individual wealth through individual and corporate investment management, estate, retirement

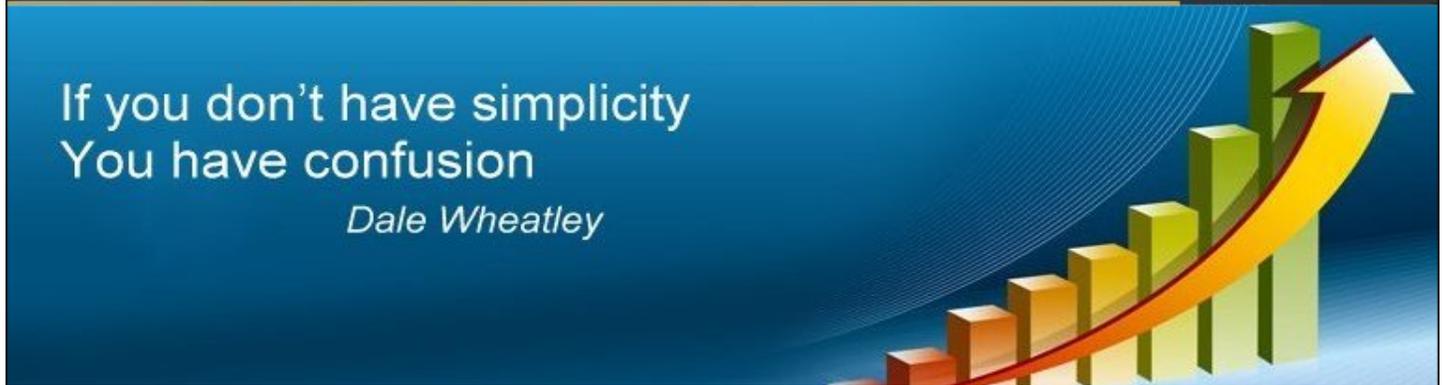
planning and tax savings strategies for over 29 years. Joe Bartosiewicz, Jr. is the founder and president of Devon Kay Financial Group, an organization that promotes and presents financial seminars and workshops for businesses, associations and individuals. Over the years, he has presented hundreds of public and private financial seminars to audiences throughout Connecticut.



# THE INDEX HUNTER

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