MONEY

Wall Street notches most gains since '13

Global economic recovery, tech stocks lead the way

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The stock market added a lot more money to 401(k) accounts in 2017, posting its biggest annual gain in four years and extending a bull market that began in 2009 and is now the second-longest in history.

Powering the broad market's nearly 20% gain was an economic recovery that reached around the globe. Rising GDP boosted corporate earnings, pushed consumer confidence to a 17-year high and slashed the jobless rate to its lowest level since 2000.

Stocks, which finished mildly lower on the final trading day of the year, also got a late-year lift from the Trump administration's tax cut, which drastically lowered the rate U.S. companies pay and could make their businesses more competitive.

Three of the four major U.S. stock indexes posted their best gains in four years. The Nasdaq composite, which benefited from large rises in well-known technology stocks such as Facebook, Apple and Google parent Alphabet, was the biggest winner with a gain of 28.2%.

The Dow Jones industrial average, an index of 30 blue-chip stocks, rose 25.1%. And the large-company Standard & Poor's 500 increased 19.4%.

A 401(k) investor who had $100,000 invested in the broad S&P 500 at the start of the year is sitting on $19,400 in paper gains. The Russell 2000, an index of small-company stocks, gained 13.1%, less than its 19.5% return in 2016.

Dow's milestone year: The Dow, which started the year below 20,000, mowed down 1,000-point milestones at its fastest pace since its creation in 1896. It topped 20K a few days after President Trump took office and barreled past 24K on Nov. 30.

The Dow, which finished the year at 24,719.22, also posted 71 record highs, eclipsing its prior record of 69 from 1995.

Tiny price swings: Sure, Bitcoin took investors on a wild ride, skyrocketing one day and plunging the next. But the stock market was the calmest it has been in more than 50 years.

There were only eight days in 2017 that the S&P 500 moved more than 1% in either direction — the tamest trading year since 1964, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

Tech stocks are No. 1: In a world going digital in a hurry, with robots, smartphones, the cloud and artificial intelligence spreading throughout homes and businesses, technology stocks topped the 2017 performance charts.

The S&P 500's information technology industry group rose 37%, putting it at the top of the 11 major groups tracked by S&P Dow Jones Indices.

The worst-performing groups were telecom and energy, which both finished the year in the red with single-digit percentage losses.

The best and worst stocks: The top stock in the S&P 500 is Align Technology. The dental tech company best known for Invisalign, a clear aligner for teeth that is an alternative to traditional dental braces, jumped 131% this year, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

The worst stock: Range Resources. Shares of the Fort Worth-based energy company fell 50%.