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What is the best stock broker for beginners

With another round of funding, Robinhood has seen its valuation surge to \$11.2 billion. Its not surprising considering the fact that the company added 3 million new customer accounts at the beginning of fiscal year 2020. As markets continue to trade near all-time-highs, retail investor interest remains elevated. Capital preservation is one of the most important objectives when selecting stocks to buy for beginners. Initial losses might scare new investors from markets that have consistently been able to beat most asset classes in the long term. Even if there is a correction, it would provide an opportunity for entry for the long term. Laura Gonzalez, Ph.D., associate professor of Finance at California State University in Long Beach, outlined the strategy for beginners. "Beginning investors need to keep in mind that the opportunity to enter the financial markets is based on institutional and regulatory protections, as well as the need to time the entry," she said. "The goal is to buy low, minimize fees and let long term diversified investments take care of market fluctuations. There is no need to invest large amounts. The key is to start small, strategically, and don't wait until middle age." I see the keywords as attractive valuations, long-term exposure and a diversified portfolio. 9 Gold Stocks to Buy That Still Have Room to Run Let's look at four stocks to buy for beginners. These names are worth holding in the core portfolio for the next few years. Costco Wholesale (NASDAQ:COST) Apple (NASDAQ:AAPL) Lockheed Martin (NYSE:LMT) AstraZeneca PLC (NYSE:AZN) Stocks to Buy for Beginners: Costco Wholesale (COST) Source: ilzesgimene / Shutterstock.com In the list of stocks to buy for beginners, COST stock is among my top picks. The stock has a beta of 0.69 and is a perfect defensive stock for beginners. In addition, the company currently has a dividend payout of \$2.80 per share and dividends are likely to increase in the coming years. In terms of business, Costco currently has 55.8 million households as members. Further, the company generated \$3.5 billion in cash fees in the last 12-months. With 91% renewal rate in U.S. and Canada, there is clear cash-flow visibility. Another important growth factor is that Costco started building a presence in China. The company has ample financial headroom for aggressive growth. In the coming years, cash fees should continue to trend higher. The company's focus on e-commerce is also delivering results. For the 48-weeks ended Aug. 2, the company reported 46.1% growth in e-commerce sales on a year-over-year basis. With all these positives, COST stock has been on an uptrend. I believe the positive momentum is likely to sustain and beginners can consider gradual exposure to the stock. Apple (AAPL) Click to EnlargeSource: mama_mia / Shutterstock.com AAPL stock is another name that should be among the top stocks to buy for beginners. The stock has surged by 146% in the last year, but I believe that there is more juice in the rally. Recently, Wedbush analyst Daniel Ives raised the stock's target price to \$600 with a bull case target price of \$700. With AAPL stock currently trading around \$500, there is ample scope for upside. The first reason to like Apple is that the company is a cash-flow machine. For the first nine months of the year, the company generated operating cash flow of \$60 billion. The company also has nearly \$200 billion in cash and equivalents. This leaves ample scope for shareholder value creation through dividends and share repurchase. In addition, the company's financial flexibility allows investment in innovation and inorganic growth. Recently, the company acquired a virtual reality firm that creates immersive Zoom calls. Apple is also more diversified with strong growth in services and wearable segment of business. 9 Gold Stocks to Buy That Still Have Room to Run Overall, with healthy earnings growth, focus on innovation and continued shareholder value creation, AAPL stock is worth holding. Lockheed Martin (LMT) Source: Ken Wolter / Shutterstock.com LMT stock is another name that has a beta of less than one. In addition, the company offers a dividend of about \$9.60. With the defense sector immune to cyclical swings in the economy, Lockheed Martin is a core portfolio stock. As of second quarter of 2020, Lockheed Martin reported an order backlog of \$150 billion. Recently, the company won a \$62 billion contract for F-16 foreign military sales. As the order backlog swells, the company has clear revenue and cash-flow visibility. The recent foreign military sales contract is also significant as the company's sales diversify beyond the United States. I also like the fact that LMT stock is currently trading at a price-earnings-ratio of 16.4. With the S&P 500 Index trading at a P/E of 29.8, the stock is relatively attractive. Further, the stock has been in an extended consolidation zone with returns of 4.8% in the last one year. I would not be surprised if there is a break-out on the upside. AstraZeneca PLC (AZN) AZN stock is another name that has a significantly low beta of 0.26 and is worth considering for beginners. The stock also pays an annual dividend of \$1.40. I also like AZN stock as the company gives new investors exposure to the pharmaceuticals sector, which has been in limelight since the novel coronavirus pandemic. Besides being a front-runner in the race for the Covid-19 vaccine, there are other reasons to like AstraZeneca from a business perspective. The company has a strong late-stage pipeline of drugs and that will translate into strong growth in the coming years. Its worth noting that the new medicines segment delivered 45% growth in the first half of 2020 with the oncology division delivering 31% growth. If the development remains positive related to the Covid-19 vaccine, earnings growth can accelerate in the coming year. Overall AZN stock is worth holding in the portfolio and offers protection against market volatility besides growth visibility. I also expect the company's dividend to increase in the coming years. Faisal Humayun is a senior research analyst with 12 years of industry experience in the field of credit research, equity research and financial modelling. Faisal has authored over 1,500 stock specific articles with focus on the technology, energy and commodities sector. As of this writing, Faisal Humayun did not hold a position in any of the aforementioned securities. Your investing success could depend on it. Image source: Getty Images Image source: Getty Images.Most investors understand that buying the best stocks in the market can bring them great financial success. But in an industry where there are so many different investments available, it's not always clear why you really need to invest in a brokerage account through a stock broker.If you're satisfied with either earning average returns or allowing professional investors to take your money and invest it on your behalf, then you don't actually need to open a brokerage account. But if you're interested in the much better returns that you can earn if you identify and invest in the most promising companies you can find, then you'll want to start a business relationship with a good stock broker as soon as you can.The three main investing alternatives to brokerage accountsRather than starting with the reasons why you need a stock broker, it's actually easier to look at situations in which you don't need a brokerage account. If you want to invest, you need some way of getting access to the investments that will help you reach your financial goals. There are a limited number of ways to achieve that goal. Find the best stock broker for you among these top picks. Whether you're looking for a special sign-up offer, outstanding customer support, \$0 commissions, intuitive mobile apps, or more, you'll find a stock broker to fit your trading needs. See the picks The first place where most people stash their spare money is in a bank account. Checking accounts typically pay next to nothing in terms of interest, but you can find savings accounts or certificates of deposit that will give you at least some return. But the problem with relying on bank accounts for the money you want to invest is that the rates of interest you'll receive will never come close to matching what the stock market has given investors historically. And you'll never find an investment offered by a bank's traditional banking business that's designed to give you true stock market exposure.A much more reasonable way to invest that doesn't involve a stock broker is through mutual funds. These investments involve multiple investors pooling together their savings into a single investment vehicle, with a manager that takes all of the money and invests it according to a specific objective. You can find mutual funds that specialize in all sorts of investments, including stock mutual funds that concentrate solely or primarily on stocks.Mutual funds fall into one of two main categories based on how they choose their investments. Index funds are designed to track an outside index of investments, often simply by buying all the stocks that make up the benchmark in question. For instance, an S&P 500 index mutual fund usually owns all 500 stocks of the companies in the S&P 500, in the same proportions that the managers of the index use to calculate the S&P 500 every day. Index funds tend to have low costs, which enables their shareholders to come very close to matching the performance of the index that they track. However, index funds aren't designed to give investors any opportunity to outperform that index. So if you want market-beating returns, index funds will never be able to deliver.Actively managed mutual funds are different. These funds employ professional investors whose job it is to find the best available investments. These professionals cost more than the managers who simply track an index, so your total expenses from investing in an active mutual fund will often be substantially higher than what an index fund charges. If the pros are successful in delivering market-beating returns, then you can end up ahead. Unfortunately, more often than not, that doesn't happen, and active mutual fund investors earn worse returns than they would have with an index fund.Finally, the last common alternative to a stock broker is to hire someone to invest your assets in a separately managed account. These services look a lot like an active mutual fund, except that your money isn't pooled together with anyone else's. You can have a portfolio customized to your own particular needs. The downsides of separately managed accounts are that they're often expensive, and they usually require substantial amounts of money to invest before an account manager will be willing to take on the account.Why the right stock broker can be better than all the alternativesOpening your own brokerage account with a stock broker requires a choice that's a lot different from using bank accounts, mutual funds, or separately managed accounts. Fundamentally, the key reason why a stock broker can be the gateway to life-changing wealth is because you're the one who takes full control of your investment portfolio when you open a brokerage account. You don't have a banking institution, a mutual fund manager, or an investment professional pulling the strings and trying to find the best way to invest your money. You're the one with the responsibility for making that happen, and while a good stock broker will give you the tools you need to improve your chances of eventual success, the effort that you put in is most important in determining your long-term results.In particular, here are just some of the many advantages that having your own brokerage account with a stock broker can be valuable: Once you've chosen one of our top-rated brokers, you need to make sure you're buying the right stocks. We think there's no better place to start than with Stock Advisor, the flagship stock-picking service of our company, The Motley Fool. You'll get two new stock picks every month from legendary investors and Motley Fool co-founders Tom and David Gardner, plus 10 starter stocks and best buys now. Over the past 17 years, Stock Advisor's average stock pick has seen a 582% return — more than 4.5x that of the S&P 500! (as of 5/3/2021). Learn more and get started today with a special new member discount. Start investing You can buy or sell any stock that's available in the stock markets to which your broker has access. That will almost always include every company listed on the New York Stock Exchange or Nasdaq Stock Market.Increasingly, brokers can also give you direct access to foreign stock exchanges as well. That can give you the ability to invest internationally in ways that let you call all the shots in terms of stock selection and risk management.Many stock brokers recognize the value of offering other sorts of investments, including bonds, mutual funds, and even bank account products. Top stock brokers can therefore give you a one-stop shopping environment to take care of all your financial needs, letting you simplify your money management rather than having various accounts spread among many different financial institutions.Stock brokers also have access to valuable research resources that clients can tap into in order to get more insight on the investments that they're interested in. These tools give you the ability to weigh different opinions and then choose the ones that are most compelling to you.You'll often find that stock brokers are also willing to give you broader financial advice that goes beyond simple investing. One way that different brokerage companies try to distinguish themselves from their competitors is through their customer service, so you can often find resources in related areas that range from budgeting tools and mortgage calculators to estate planning.The ideal stock broker has a combination of attractive features. Fees a broker charges for stock trade commissions and other account expenses should be low. Your broker should give you all the account features you want, whether it's research, other types of financial accounts, or the ability to get advice from an investment professional from time to time. You should be able to open various types of accounts with your broker, including tax-favored retirement accounts like IRAs as well as regular taxable brokerage accounts. Which items are most important to you may vary, but figuring out what you want will help you identify which broker is best for you.Don't throw away your shotThe most valuable asset you have with investing is time. Every month you wait to get started by opening a brokerage account and starting to invest is one month less that you'll earn the long-term returns that add up over time and transform even modest amounts of money into true wealth. By looking for a stock broker that best meets your own personal and financial needs, you'll be in the best possible position to achieve all of your financial dreams.

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