# Alliance Data(ADS)

**$115.58** (As of 03/15/21)

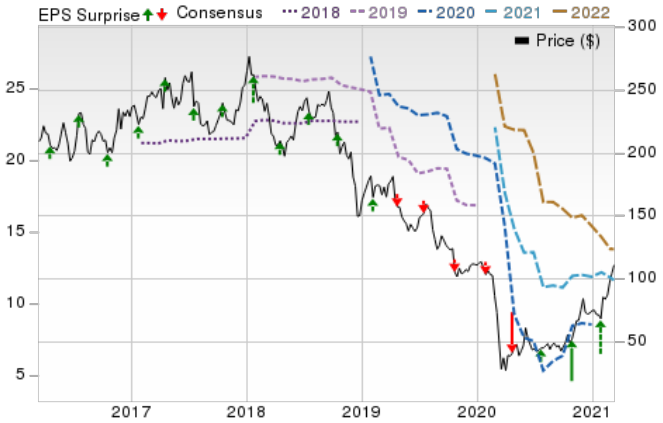
Price Target (6-12 Months): **$121.00**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Long Term: 6-12 Months | **Zacks Recommendation:** (Since: 05/25/20) Prior Recommendation: Underperform | **Neutral** |
| Short Term: 1-3 Months | **Zacks Rank:** (1-5) | **3-Hold** |
| | Zacks Style Scores: | VGM:B |
| | Value: A \| Growth: F \| Momentum: A | |

## Summary

Shares of Alliance Data have outperformed the industry in year-to-date period. The company continues to benefit from data-driven marketing strategies. Solid receivables growth in Card Services along with strong LoyaltyOne should drive its top line. Acquisitions and divestitures will aid the company in growing inorganically and expanding the international footprint. Moreover, the company has a strong balance sheet by virtue of its solid cash position. The company remains focused toward returning value shareholders in the form of share buybacks. However, rising debt levels have led to an increase in interest expenses, raising financial risk and straining margin expansion. Increased cost of operations, and higher general and administrative expenses tend to weigh on the company's margin expansion. Also, lower return on assets poses financial risk.

## Price, Consensus & Surprise

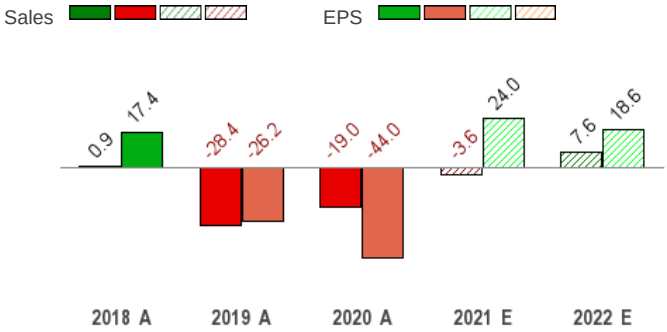



*Source: Zacks Investment Research*

## Data Overview

| | |
|---|---|
| 52-Week High-Low | **$117.01 - $20.51** |
| 20-Day Average Volume (Shares) | **957,578** |
| Market Cap | **$5.5 B** |
| Year-To-Date Price Change | **49.0%** |
| Beta | **2.58** |
| Dividend / Dividend Yield | **$0.84 / 0.7%** |
| Industry | **Financial Transaction Services** |
| Zacks Industry Rank | **Bottom 33% (169 out of 253)** |
| Last EPS Surprise | **33.5%** |
| Last Sales Surprise | **-1.1%** |
| EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change | **0.7%** |
| Expected Report Date | **04/22/2021** |
| Earnings ESP | **2.1%** |
| P/E TTM | **11.8** |
| P/E F1 | **9.9** |
| PEG F1 | **0.6** |
| P/S TTM | **1.2** |

## Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)




## Sales Estimates (millions of $)

| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Annual* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2022 | 1,139 E | 1,105 E | 1,170 E | 1,269 E | 4,693 E |
| 2021 | 1,074 E | 1,029 E | 1,088 E | 1,178 E | 4,360 E |
| 2020 | 1,382 A | 979 A | 1,051 A | 1,110 A | 4,521 A |

## EPS Estimates

| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Annual* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2022 | $3.53 E | $3.27 E | $3.56 E | $3.23 E | $13.80 E |
| 2021 | $3.24 E | $2.95 E | $2.97 E | $2.74 E | $11.64 E |
| 2020 | $0.75 A | $1.86 A | $3.45 A | $3.31 A | $9.39 A |

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and sales estimates, is as of 03/15/2021. The report's text and the analyst-provided price target are as of 03/16/2021.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Please see important disclosures and definitions at the end of this report.

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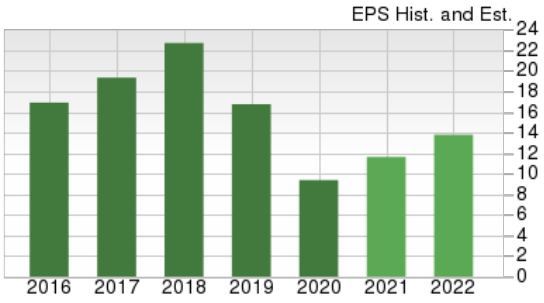
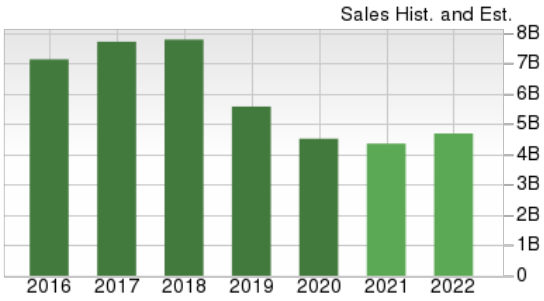
## Overview

Headquartered in Plano, TX and founded in 1996, Alliance Data Systems Corporation is a private label credit card processing firm for mid-market specialty retail stores in the U.S. It provides transaction, marketing and credit services in the United States, Canada and internationally. Using transaction-rich data, Alliance Data creates and manages customized solutions that change consumer behavior and enable its clients to create and enhance customer loyalty to build stronger, mutually beneficial relationships with their customers. The company is a leading player among its competitors. Alliance Data is one of the largest third party payment processors in the United States and the second largest third party private label card issuer as measured by accounts. In Canada, it owns and operates the premier coalition loyalty-marketing program (AIR MILES).




On Jul 1, 2019, Alliance Data sold its Epsilon business to Publicis Groupe. Therefore, the company operates in two reportable segments: LoyaltyOne and Card Services.

**Card Services (83% of 2020 revenues)** provides risk management solutions, account origination, funding, transaction processing, customer care and collections services for the company's private label retail credit card programs.

**LoyaltyOne (17%)** uses information gathered through loyalty programs to help clients in designing and implementing marketing programs. Clients include financial services providers, grocers, drug stores, petroleum retailers and specialty retailers.

The company derives revenues primarily from the company's coalition and short-term loyalty programs through its AIR MILES Reward Program and BrandLoyalty.

*Source: Zacks Investment Research*

## Reasons To Buy:

Alliance Data's high-ROI Card Service segment, solid inorganic background, strengthening its balance sheet to gain financial flexibility and effective capital deployment bodes well for growth.

- Shares of Alliance Data have gained 55.9% in the year-to-date outperforming the industry's increase of 4.3%. Moreover, strong fundamentals of the company are likely to help the stock continue performing well going forward.

- Organic growth has been a key strength at Alliance Data. We believe the company to retain its revenue momentum in the coming quarters with ample opportunities from the current trend in consumer-based businesses shifting their marketing spend to data-driven marketing strategies. Though credit card sales declined year over year due to the pandemic, it improved sequentially with gradual economic recovery. It estimates credit sales to grow in high single digits in 2021. Alliance Data believes its proprietary Comenity Card will retain membership and drive new sales. It projects 2021 year end receivables to be in line with year end 2020. Strategic agreement with Fiserv enables efficient integration and use of mobile wallet and virtual cards as well as support data and analytics capabilities while lowers service costs. The company is prudently investing in strategic growth areas and ramping up marketing spends in growth verticals.

- Alliance Data has made several strategic acquisitions to grow inorganically. Acquisitions have helped the company expand international footprint, consolidate its position in digital agency, boost the LoyaltyOne business, strengthen position in the digital marketing channels, expand its Omni-Channel distribution capabilities and widen presence in Brazil. Recently, Alliance Data inked a definitive agreement to acquire Bread, a technology-driven digital payments company. The acquisition, expected to be closed in the fourth quarter of 2020, will expand digital offerings. With solid financial strength and flexibility, we expect Alliance Data to pursue strategic acquisitions that supports international expansion, with solid growth opportunities.

- Alliance Data remains focused toward returning value to its shareholders. It uses share repurchases as a tool to mitigate the adverse impact of foreign exchange and intends to focus more into share buybacks and then into mergers and acquisitions. Though the company has a new share buyback authorization of $1.1 billion, it has suspended the same in the wake of the pandemic.

- Alliance Data has a strong balance sheet by virtue of its solid cash position. Debt level at 2020 end was down 1.6% from 2019-end to $2.8 billion. Cash and cash equivalents came in at $3.1 billion with $750 million in unused revolver. This suggests that the company has sufficient cash reserves to meet debt obligations. The company also extended the timeline for further debt reduction of $2 billion from Jun 2021 till Dec 2022, and extended an additional debt of $850 million from Jun 2021 to Dec 2024.

## Reasons To Sell:

- Alliance Data has been witnessing a rise in operating expenses for the past few years due to higher cost of operations and an increased general and administrative expense. Total operating expenses have escalated 40.2% in the last five years. However, in 2020, operating expenses dropped 23.1% year over year. Net margin dropped 30 bps year over year in 2020. The company remains committed to lower expenses and realized $240 million of fixed expense savings in 2020. We will have to wait and see if the company can retain the momentum. The company expects 2021 expenses to remain flat with 2020 level.

- Alliance Data is exposed to fluctuations in exchange rate between the U.S. and the Canadian dollar and between the U.S. dollar and euro. This is a major concern. In 2019, foreign currency movements relative to the U.S. dollar negatively impacted its revenues by approximately $45 million and income from operations before income taxes by approximately $1 million.

- The company's return of equity of 34% compares unfavorably with the prior quarter's figure of 36.6%. This implies inefficient utilization of shareholders fund.

Alliance Data's increasing expenses due to higher cost of operations and an increased general and administrative expense and poor return on equity raise concern.

## Last Earnings Report

**Alliance Data Q4 Earnings & Revenues Top, Decline Y/Y**

| Quarter Ending | 12/2020 |
|---|---|
| Report Date | Jan 28, 2021 |
| Sales Surprise | -1.12% |
| EPS Surprise | 33.47% |
| Quarterly EPS | 3.31 |
| Annual EPS (TTM) | 9.37 |

Alliance Data operating earnings of $3.31 per share for the fourth quarter of 2020 beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate of $2.48. The quarterly earnings benefited from continued gradual recovery in Card Services credit sales.

However, the bottom line plunged 20% year over year.

**Behind the Headlines**

Alliance Data reported total revenues of $1.1 billion, down 24% year over year, attributable to the continuing impacts of COVID-19. Both Card Services as well as LoyaltyOne segment generated lower revenues. The top line however beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 1.1%.

Operating expenses decreased 26.1% year over year to $851.2 million. Operating income decreased 16.3% year over year to $258.7 million largely due to lower revenues.

Adjusted EBITDA (net of funding costs) increased 2% year over year to $282.3 million.

**Segment Update**

**LoyaltyOne**: Revenues totaled $231 million, down 31% year over year, attributable to fewer short-term loyalty programs due to the impact of COVID-19 as well as the divestment of Precima.

Adjusted EBITDA decreased 45% to $44.3 million.

AIR MILES reward miles issued decreased 9%, reflecting a decline in discretionary spending, including credit card spend and delays in promotions by sponsors. AIR MILES reward miles redeemed declined 30%, reflecting the impact of the pandemic on travel-related categories, offset in part by strength from merchandise redemptions.

BrandLoyalty revenues decreased 35% due to a decline in programs.

**Card Services**: Revenues were $879 million, down 22% year over year, attributable to a decline in average receivables, primarily reflecting a decline in average receivables, lower sales volumes, and to some extent interest rate cuts earlier in 2020. Adjusted EBITDA was $259.8 million, up 24% year over year.

**Full-Year Highlights**

Operating earnings of $9.39 per share beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate of $8.57. However, the bottom line plunged 44% year over year.

Operating revenues of $4.5 billion in 2020 declined 19% year over year and marginally lagged the consensus estimate.

**Financial Update**

As of Dec 31, 2020, cash and cash equivalents was $3.1 billion, down 20.5% from Dec 31, 2019-level.

At quarter end, the debt level was down 1.6% from 2019-end to $2.8 billion.

Cash from operations increased 1.5% year over year to $1.9 billion in 2020. Capital expenditure at Alliance Data declined 62% year over year to $54 million in the same period.

**Dividend Update**

The board of directors approved a quarterly dividend of 21 cents to be paid out on Mar 18 to stockholders of record as of Feb 12.

**2021 Guidance**

Total revenues are estimated to be down in low single digits from 2020 as the impact from lower receivables is expected to be partially offset by improving revenues from LoyaltyOne and the Bread acquisition.

Credit sales are projected to increase in high single digits. The company expects to resume high single-digit to low double-digit card receivables growth as it exits 2021.

Expenses are expected to remain flat with 2020 level. It includes more than $100 million of digital innovation and technology enhancement investment to support growth and the delivery of positive operating leverage in 2022.

## Recent News

**Alliance Data's Average Receivables Plunge Y/Y in February** – Mar 15, 2021

Alliance Data's February average receivables fell 14% year over year. Delinquency rate of 4.3% declined from 5.9% in the prior-year comparable period.

**Alliance Data Card Services Partners Victoria's Secret** - Feb 25, 2021

Alliance Data Systems's Card Services business recently collaborated with its long-time brand partner Victoria's Secret in a bid to provide its cardmembers a secured payment option. The partnership is expected to boost Alliance Data's Card Services segment.The latest tie-up is intended to reissue an improved private label credit card, known as Victoria's Secret Credit Card, for the cardmembers. Victoria's Secret Credit Card with new online payment features will enable cardmembers to pursue contactless transactions with the use of Apple Pay, which is considered to be a secured payment method. They will also get the privilege of having private label shopping experiences on the market.

**Alliance Data's Average Receivables Plunge Y/Y in January** – Feb 16, 2021

Alliance Data's January average receivables fell 14% year over year. Delinquency rate of 4.3% declined from 6% in the prior-year comparable period.

**Alliance Data, Famous Footwear Inks Deal** – Feb 2, 2021

Alliance Data's Card Services business introduced a private label credit card program for Famous Footwear, a leading destination for family footwear.

## Valuation

Alliance Data's shares are up 55.9% and 274.4% in the year-to-date period and over the trailing 12-month period, respectively. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Finance sector are up 4.3% and 3.9% in the year-to-date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and sector are up 42.9% and 27.9%, respectively.

The S&P 500 index is up 5.4% in the year-to-date period and 58.2% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 9.57x forward 12-month price to earnings, which compares to 32.07x for the Zacks sub-industry, 30.61x for the Zacks sector and 22.48x for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 15.39x and as low as 1.09x, with a 5-year median of 9.33x. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our $121 price target reflects 10.02x forward 12-month earnings.

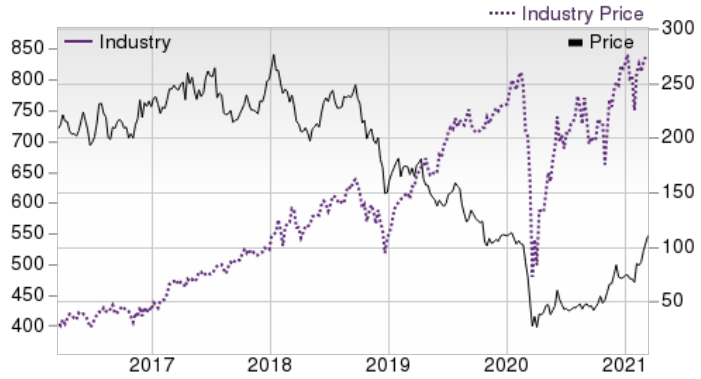
The table below shows summary valuation data for ADS

**Valuation Multiples - ADS**

| | | Stock | Sub-Industry | Sector | S&P 500 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P/E F12M | Current | 9.57 | 32.07 | 30.61 | 22.48 |
| | 5-Year High | 15.39 | 32.16 | 30.97 | 23.8 |
| | 5-Year Low | 1.09 | 20.77 | 19.45 | 15.3 |
| | 5-Year Median | 9.33 | 23.83 | 22.06 | 17.9 |
| P/S F12M | Current | 1.29 | 11.54 | 5.82 | 4.56 |
| | 5-Year High | 1.89 | 11.54 | 5.82 | 4.56 |
| | 5-Year Low | 0.19 | 7.18 | 2.91 | 3.21 |
| | 5-Year Median | 1.37 | 9.16 | 3.48 | 3.69 |
| P/B TTM | Current | 3.63 | 7.64 | 6.66 | 6.66 |
| | 5-Year High | 10.78 | 12.55 | 6.67 | 6.66 |
| | 5-Year Low | 0.66 | 5.1 | 3.23 | 3.83 |
| | 5-Year Median | 5.67 | 8 | 4.98 | 4.97 |

*As of 03/15/2021* *Source: Zacks Investment Research*

## Industry Analysis **Zacks Industry Rank:** Bottom 33% (169 out of 253)




*Source: Zacks Investment Research*

## Top Peers

| Company (Ticker) | Rec | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Diebold Nixdorf, Incorporated **(DBD)** | Outperform | 1 |
| Cardtronics PLC **(CATM)** | Neutral | 3 |
| Equifax, Inc. **(EFX)** | Neutral | 3 |
| FleetCor Technologies, Inc. **(FLT)** | Neutral | 3 |
| Global Payments Inc. **(GPN)** | Neutral | 4 |
| PagSeguro Digital Ltd. **(PAGS)** | Neutral | 3 |
| WEX Inc. **(WEX)** | Neutral | 3 |
| The Western Union Company **(WU)** | Neutral | 3 |

*The positions listed should not be deemed a recommendation to buy, hold or sell.*

## Industry Comparison Industry: Financial Transaction Services

| | ADS | X Industry | S&P 500 | DBD | GPN | WU |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)** | Neutral | - | - | Outperform | Neutral | Neutral |
| **Zacks Rank (Short Term)** | 3 | - | - | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| **VGM Score** | B | - | - | B | C | A |
| Market Cap | 5.49 B | 2.59 B | 28.65 B | 1.32 B | 63.50 B | 10.15 B |
| # of Analysts | 15 | 7 | 13 | 2 | 17 | 8 |
| Dividend Yield | 0.76% | 0.00% | 1.38% | 0.00% | 0.36% | 3.64% |
| **Value Score** | A | - | - | A | C | A |
| Cash/Price | 0.56 | 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.27 | 0.03 | 0.14 |
| EV/EBITDA | 11.24 | 21.92 | 16.24 | 13.32 | 26.68 | 9.99 |
| PEG F1 | 0.60 | 2.03 | 2.38 | NA | 1.83 | NA |
| P/B | 3.46 | 5.09 | 3.92 | NA | 2.34 | 54.42 |
| P/CF | 8.44 | 18.00 | 16.36 | 4.65 | 18.45 | 10.31 |
| P/E F1 | 9.73 | 25.57 | 21.26 | 7.66 | 27.05 | 12.01 |
| P/S TTM | 1.21 | 5.60 | 3.30 | 0.34 | 8.55 | 2.10 |
| Earnings Yield | 10.54% | 3.76% | 4.59% | 13.06% | 3.70% | 8.34% |
| Debt/Equity | 6.44 | 0.32 | 0.67 | -2.81 | 0.31 | 16.44 |
| Cash Flow ($/share) | 13.70 | 2.38 | 6.78 | 3.69 | 11.68 | 2.44 |
| **Growth Score** | F | - | - | B | D | C |
| Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years) | -5.17% | 13.76% | 9.32% | -23.62% | 19.60% | 1.69% |
| Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0) | 23.91% | 20.34% | 14.55% | 182.05% | 24.25% | 9.96% |
| Current Cash Flow Growth | -42.00% | -0.77% | 0.72% | 33.25% | 65.58% | 0.01% |
| Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years) | -14.11% | 11.03% | 7.32% | 8.92% | 49.12% | -2.39% |
| Current Ratio | 1.88 | 1.15 | 1.39 | 1.13 | 1.01 | 1.00 |
| Debt/Capital | 86.56% | 28.76% | 41.42% | NA | 23.55% | 94.26% |
| Net Margin | 4.73% | 5.83% | 10.59% | -6.90% | 7.87% | 15.39% |
| Return on Equity | 33.97% | 10.15% | 14.65% | -7.88% | 6.65% | 10,167.31% |
| Sales/Assets | 0.20 | 0.42 | 0.51 | 1.05 | 0.17 | 0.55 |
| Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0) | -3.06% | 8.73% | 6.95% | 4.16% | 12.11% | 5.65% |
| **Momentum Score** | A | - | - | F | A | A |
| Daily Price Change | 4.65% | 1.03% | 0.92% | 1.90% | 0.23% | 1.90% |
| 1-Week Price Change | 6.45% | 3.71% | 2.96% | 11.07% | 8.46% | 2.53% |
| 4-Week Price Change | 38.95% | 1.29% | 4.69% | 27.66% | 9.32% | 4.92% |
| 12-Week Price Change | 69.27% | 8.89% | 10.09% | 51.81% | 7.55% | 14.15% |
| 52-Week Price Change | 220.08% | 62.00% | 74.12% | 332.49% | 54.15% | 20.78% |
| 20-Day Average Volume (Shares) | 957,578 | 602,068 | 2,323,115 | 902,616 | 1,811,251 | 4,432,764 |
| EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change | 0.40% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change | 0.68% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change | -5.15% | -1.13% | 2.09% | 21.88% | -1.81% | 2.17% |
| EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change | 1.60% | 0.00% | 0.00% | -27.27% | 0.00% | 0.00% |

*Source: Zacks Investment Research*

## Zacks Stock Rating System

We offer two rating systems that take into account investors' holding horizons: Zacks Rank and Zacks Recommendation. Each provides valuable insights into the future profitability of the stock and can be used separately or in combination with each other depending on your investment style.

## Zacks Recommendation

The Zacks Recommendation aims to predict performance over the next 6 to 12 months. The foundation for the quantitatively determined Zacks Recommendation is trends in the company's estimate revisions and earnings outlook. The Zacks Recommendation is broken down into 3 Levels; Outperform, Neutral and Underperform. Unlike many Wall Street firms, we maintain a balance between the number of Outperform and Neutral recommendations. Our team of 70 analysts are fully versed in the benefits of earnings estimate revisions and how that is harnessed through the Zacks quantitative rating system. But we have given our analysts the ability to override the Zacks Recommendation for the 1200 stocks that they follow. The reason for the analyst over-rides is that there are often factors such as valuation, industry conditions and management effectiveness that a trained investment professional can spot better than a quantitative model.

## Zacks Rank

The Zacks Rank is our short-term rating system that is most effective over the one- to three-month holding horizon. The underlying driver for the quantitatively-determined Zacks Rank is the same as the Zacks Recommendation, and reflects trends in earnings estimate revisions.

## Zacks Style Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Value Score | A |
| Growth Score | F |
| Momentum Score | A |
| VGM Score | B |

The Zacks Style Score is as a complementary indicator to the Zacks rating system, giving investors a way to focus on the highest rated stocks that best fit their own stock picking preferences.

Academic research has proven that stocks with the best Value, Growth and Momentum characteristics outperform the market. The Zacks Style Scores rate stocks on each of these individual styles and assigns a rating of A, B, C, D and F. We also produce the VGM Score (V for Value, G for Growth and M for Momentum), which combines the weighted average of the individual Style Scores into one score. This is perfectly suited for those who want their stocks to have the best scores across the board.

As an investor, you want to buy stocks with the highest probability of success. That means buying stocks with a Zacks Recommendation of Outperform, which also has a Style Score of an A or a B.

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**Returns quoted represent past performance which is no guarantee of future results.** Investment returns and principal value will fluctuate so that when shares are redeemed, they may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance may be higher or lower than the performance shown.

Investing involves risk; principal loss is possible. There is no guarantee that companies that can issue dividends will declare, continue to pay or increase dividends.

## Glossary of Terms and Definitions

**52-Week High-Low:** The range of the highest and lowest prices at which a stock has traded during the past year. This range is determined based on the stock's daily closing price which may differ from the intra-day high or low. Many investors use it as a technical indicator to determine a stock's current value and future price movement. The idea here is that if price breaks out from the 52-week range, in either direction, the momentum may continue in the same direction.

**20-Day Average Volume (Shares):** The average number of shares of a company traded in a day over the last 20 days. It is a direct indication of a security's overall liquidity. The higher the average daily trading volume, the easier it is to enter or exit the stock at a desired price with more buyers and sellers being available.

**Daily Price Change:** This is the percentage difference between a trading day's closing price and the prior trading day's closing price. This item is updated at 9 p.m. EST each day.

**1-Week Price Change:** This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 5 trading days. This change reflects the collective buying and selling sentiment over the 1-week period.

A strong weekly price increase for the stock, especially when accompanied by increased volume, is an indication of it gaining momentum.

**4-Week Price Change:** This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 20 trading days or past 4 weeks. This is a mediumterm price change metric and an indication of the stock gaining momentum.

**12-Week Price Change:** This is the percentage change of a stock's closing price over the last 60 trading days or past 12 weeks. Similar to 4-week price change, this is a medium-term price change metric. It shows whether a stock has been enjoying strong investor demand, or if it has been in consolidation, or distress over this period.

**52-Week Price Change:** This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 260 trading days or past 52 weeks. This long-term price change metric is a good reference point for investors. Some investors seek stocks with the best percentage price change over the last 52 weeks, expecting the momentum to continue.

**Market Cap:** The number of outstanding common shares of a company times its latest price per share. This figure represents a company's size, which indicates various characteristics, including price stability and risk, in which investors could be interested.

**Year-To-Date Price Change:** Change in a stock's daily closing price in the period of time beginning the first day of the current calendar year through to the previous trading day.

**# of Analysts:** Number of EPS estimates used in calculating the current-quarter consensus. These estimates come from the brokerage analysts tracking this stock. However, the number of such analysts tracking this stock may not match the number of estimates, as all brokerage analysts may not come up with an estimate or provide it to us.

**Beta:** A measure of risk commonly used to compare the volatility of a stock to the overall market. The S&P 500 Index is the base for calculating beta and carries a value of 1. A stock with beta below 1 is less risky than the market as a whole. And a stock with beta above 1 is riskier.

**Dividend:** The portion of earnings a company is expected to distribute to its common shareholders in the next 12 months for each share they own. Dividends are usually paid quarterly. Dividend payments reflect positively on a company and help maintain investors' trust. Investors typically find dividend-paying stocks appealing because the dividend adds to any market price appreciation to result in higher return on investment (ROI). Moreover, a steady or increasing dividend payment provides investors a cushion in a down market.

**Dividend Yield:** The ratio of a company's annual dividend to its share price. The annual dividend used in the ratio is calculated based on the mostrecent dividend paid by the company. Dividend yield is an estimate of the dividend-only return from a stock in the next 12 months. Since dividend itself doesn't change frequently, dividend yield usually changes with a stock's price movement. As a result, often an unusually high dividend yield is a result of weak stock price.

**S&P 500 Index:** The Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) Index is an unmanaged group of securities considered to be representative of the stock market in general. It is a market-capitalization-weighted index of stocks of the 500 largest U.S. companies. Each stock's weight in the index is proportionate to its market value.

**Industry:** One of the 250+ groups that Zacks classifies all stocks into based on the nature of business. These groups are termed as expanded (aka "X") industries and map to their respective (economic) sectors; Zacks has 16 sectors.

**Zacks Industry Rank:** The Zacks Industry Rank is determined by calculating the average Zacks Rank for all stocks in the industry and then assigning an ordinal rank to it. For example, an industry with an average Zacks Rank of 1.6 is better than an industry with an average Zacks Rank of 2.3. So, the industry with the better average Zacks Rank would get a better Zacks Industry Rank. If an industry has the best average Zacks Rank, it would be considered the top industry (1 out of 250+), which would place it at the top 1% of Zacks-ranked industries. Studies have shown that roughly half of a stock's price movement can be attributed to the industry group it belongs to. In fact, the top 50% of Zacks-ranked industries outperforms the bottom 50% by a factor of more than 2 to 1.

**Last EPS Surprise:** The percentage deviation of a company's last reported earnings per share from the Zacks Consensus Estimate. Companies with a positive earnings surprise are more likely to surprise again in the future (or miss again if they recently missed).

**Last Sales Surprise:** The percentage deviation of a company's last reported sales from the Zacks Consensus Estimate.

**Expected Report Date:** This is an estimated date of a company's next earnings release. The information originated or gathered by Zacks Investment Research from its information providers or publicly available sources is the basis of this estimate.

**Earnings ESP:** The Zacks Earnings ESP compares the Most Accurate Estimate to the Zacks Consensus Estimate for the yet-to-be reported quarter. The Most Accurate Estimate is the most recent version of the Zacks Consensus EPS Estimate. The idea here is that analysts revising their estimates closer to an earnings release have the latest information, which could potentially be more accurate than what they and others contributing to the consensus had predicted earlier. Thus, a positive or negative Earnings ESP reading theoretically indicates the likely deviation of the actual earnings from the consensus estimate. However, the model's predictive power is significant for positive ESP readings only. A positive Earnings ESP is a strong predictor of an earnings beat, particularly when combined with a Zacks Rank #1 (Strong Buy), #2 (Buy) or #3 (Hold). Our research shows that stocks with this combination produce a positive surprise nearly 70% of the time.

**Periods:**

TTM: Trailing 12 months. Using TTM figures is an effective way of analyzing the most-recent financial data in an annualized format that helps neutralize the effects of seasonality and other quarter-to-quarter variation.

F1: Current fiscal year. This period is used to analyze the estimates for the ongoing full fiscal year.

F2: Next fiscal year. This period is used to analyze the estimates for the next full fiscal year.

F12M: Forward 12 months. Using F12M figures is an effective way of analyzing the near-term (the following four unreported quarters) estimates in an annualized manner. Instead of typically representing estimates for the full fiscal year, which may not represent the nitty-gritty of each quarter, F12M figures suggest an all-inclusive annualized estimate for the following four quarters. The annualization helps neutralize the potential effects of seasonality and other quarter-to-quarter variations.

**P/E Ratio:** The price-to-earnings ratio measures a company's current market price per share relative to its earnings per share (EPS). Usually, the trailing-12-month (TTM) EPS, current-fiscal-year (F1) EPS estimate, or forward-12-month (F12M) EPS estimate is used as the denominator. In essence, this ratio shows what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of EPS. In other words, this ratio gives a sense of what the relative value of the company is at the already reported level of earnings or at a future level of earnings.

It is one of the most widely-used multiples for determining the value of a company and helps comparing its valuation with that of a competitor, the industry group or a benchmark.

**PEG Ratio:** The price/earnings to growth ratio is a stock's P/E ratio using current fiscal year (F1) EPS estimate divided by its expected EPS growth rate over the coming 3 to 5 years. This ratio essentially determines a stock's value by factoring in the company's expected earnings growth and is thus believed to provide a more complete picture than just the P/E ratio, particularly for faster-growing companies.

**P/S Ratio:** The price-to-sales ratio is calculated as a company's current price per share divided by trailing 12 months (TTM) sales or revenues per share. This ratio shows what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of TTM sales per share. The P/S ratio is at times the only valuation metric when the company has yet to become profitable.

**Cash/Price Ratio:** The cash-to-price ratio or Cash Yield is calculated as cash and marketable securities per share divided by the company's current share price. Like the earnings yield, which shows the anticipated yield (or return) on a stock from earnings for each dollar invested, the cash yield does the same, with cash being the source of return instead of earnings. For example, a cash/price ratio of 0.08 suggests a return of 8% or 8 cents for every $1 investment.

**EV/EBITDA Ratio:** The EV/EBITDA ratio, also known as Enterprise Multiple, is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization). Usually, trailing-12-month (TTM) or forward-12-month (F12M) EBITDA is used as the denominator.

**EV/Sales Ratio:** The enterprise value-to-sales ratio is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by annual sales. It is an expansion of the P/S valuation, which uses market value instead of enterprise value. The EV/Sales ratio is perceived as more accurate than P/S, in part, because the market capitalization does not take a company's debt into account when valuing it.

**EV/CF Ratio:** The enterprise value-to-cash flow ratio is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by the trailing-12-month (TTM) operating cash flow. It's a measure of how long it would take to buy the entire business if you were able to use all the company's operating cash flow.

The EV/CF ratio is perceived as more accurate than the P/CF ratio, in part, because the market price does not take a company's debt into account when valuing it.

**EV/FCF Ratio:** The enterprise value-to-free cash flow metric compares a company's enterprise value to its trailing-12-month (TTM) free cash flow (FCF). This metric is very similar to the EV/CF ratio, but is considered a more exact measure owing to the fact that it uses free cash flow, which subtracts capital expenditures (CAPEX) from a company's total operating cash flow, thereby reflecting the actual cash flow available for funding growth activities and payments to shareholders.

**P/EBITDA Ratio:** The P/EBITDA ratio is calculated as a company's per share market value divided by EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization). This metric is very similar to the EV/EBITDA ratio, but is considered a little less exact measure as it uses market price, which does not take a company's debt into account. However, since EBITDA is often considered a proxy for cash income, the metric is used as a measure of what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of the company's cash profitability in the trailing 12 months (TTM) or forward 12 months (F12M).

**P/B Ratio:** The price-to-book ratio is calculated as a company's current price per share divided by its book value (total assets – liabilities – preferred stocks) per share. In short, the book value is how much a company is worth. In other words, it reflects the total value of a company's assets that its common shareholders would receive if it were to be liquidated. So, the P/B ratio indicates whether you're paying higher or lower than what would remain if the company went bankrupt immediately. Investors typically use this metric to determine how a company's stock price stacks up to its intrinsic value.

**P/TB Ratio:** The price-to-tangible-book value ratio is calculated as a the per share market value of a company divided by the value of its tangible assets (total assets – liabilities – preferred stocks – intangible assets) per share. Tangible book value is the same thing as book value except it excludes the value of intangible assets to get a step closer to the baseline value of the company.

**P/CF Ratio:** The price-to-cash flow ratio measures a company's per share market price relative to its trailing-12-month (TTM) operating cash flow per share. This metric is used to determine whether a company is undervalued or overvalued relative to another stock, industry or sector. And like the P/E ratio, a lower number is typically considered better from the value perspective.

One of the reasons why P/CF ratio is often preferred over P/E ratio is the fact that operating cash flow adds back non-cash expenses such as depreciation and amortization to net income. This feature helps valuing stocks that have positive cash flow but are not profitable because of large noncash charges.

**P/FCF Ratio:** The price-to-free cash flow ratio is an extension of P/CF ratio, which uses trailing-12-month (TTM) free cash flow per share instead of operating cash flow per share. This metric is considered a more exact measure than P/CF ratio, as free cash flow subtracts capital expenditures (CAPEX) from a company's total operating cash flow, thereby reflecting the actual cash flow available for funding activities that generate additional revenues.

**Earnings Yield:** The earnings yield is calculated as current fiscal year (F1) EPS estimate divided by the company's current share price. The ratio, which is the inverse of the P/E ratio, measures the anticipated yield (or return) from earnings for each dollar invested in a stock today.

For example, earnings yield for a stock, which is trading at $35 and expected to earn $3 per share in the current fiscal year (F1), would be 0.0857 (3/35 = 0.0857) or 8.57%. In other words, for $1 invested in the stock today, the yield from earnings is anticipated to be 8.57 cents.

Investors most commonly compare the earnings yield of a stock to that of a broad market index (such as the S&P 500) and prevailing interest rates, such as the current 10-year Treasury yield. Since bonds and stocks compete for investors' dollars, stock investors typically demand a higher yield for the extra risk they assume compared to investors of U.S. Treasury-backed securities that offer virtually risk-free returns. This additional return is referred to as the risk premium.

**Debt/Equity Ratio:** The debt-to-equity ratio is calculated as a company's total liabilities divided by its shareholder equity. This metric is used to gauge a company's financial leverage. In other words, it is a measure of the degree to which a company is financing its operations through debt versus its own funds. The higher the ratio, the higher the risk for shareholders.

However, this ratio is difficult to compare across industry groups where ideal amounts of debt vary. Some businesses are more capital intensive than others and typically require higher debt to finance their operations. So, a company's debt-to-equity ratio should be compared with other companies in the same industry.

**Cash Flow ($/share):** Cash flow per share is calculated as operating cash flow (after-tax earnings + depreciation + other non-cash charges) divided by common shares outstanding. It is used by many investors as a measure of a company's financial strength. Since cash flow per share takes into consideration a company's ability to generate cash by adding back non-cash expenses, it is regarded by some as a more accurate measure of a company's financial situation than earnings per share, which could be artificially deflated.

**Current Ratio:** The current ratio or liquidity ratio is a company's current assets divided by its current liabilities. It measures a company's ability to pay short-term obligations. A current ratio that is in line with the industry average or slightly higher is generally considered acceptable. A current ratio that is lower than the industry average would indicate a higher risk of distress or default. A higher number is usually better. However, a very high current ratio compared to the industry average could be an indication of inefficient use of assets by management.

**Debt/Capital Ratio:** Debt-to-capital ratio is a company's total debt (interest-bearing debt + both short- and long-term liabilities) divided its total capital (interest-bearing debt + shareholders' equity). It is a measure of a company's financial leverage. All else being equal, the higher the debt-to-capital ratio, the riskier the stock.

However, this ratio can vary widely from industry to industry, the ideal amount of required debt being different. Some businesses are more capital intensive than others and typically require higher debt to finance their operations. So, a company's debt-to-capital ratio should be compared with the same for its industry.

**Net Margin:** Net margin is calculated as net income divided by sales. It shows how much of each dollar in sales generated by a company translates into profit. For example, if a company's net margin is 15%, its net income is 15 cents for every $1 of sales it makes.

A change in margin can reflect either a change in business conditions, or a company's cost controls, or both. If a company's expenses are growing faster than sales, its net margin will decline. However, different net margin rates are considered good for different industries, so it's better to compare net margin rates of companies in the same industry group.

**Return on Equity:** Return on equity (ROE) is calculated as trailing-12-month net income divided by trailing-12-month average shareholder equity (including reinvested earnings). This metric is considered a measure of how effectively management is using a company's assets to generate profits. For example, if a company's ROE is 10%, it creates 10 cents profits for every $1 shareholder equity, which is basically the company's assets minus debt. A company's ROE deemed good or bad depends on what's normal for its peers or industry group.

**Sales/Assets Ratio:** The sales-to-assets ratio or asset utilization ratio or asset turnover ratio is calculated as a company's annual sales divided by average assets (average of assets at the beginning of the year and at the year's end). This metric helps investors understand how effectively a company is using its assets to generate sales. For example, a sales-to-assets ratio of 2.5 indicates that the company generated $2.50 in sales for every $1 of assets on its books.

The higher the sales-to-assets ratio, the better the company is performing. However, similar to many other ratios, the asset turnover ratio tends to be higher for companies in certain industries/sectors than in others. So, a company's sales-to-assets ratio should be compared with the same for its industry/sector.

**Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years):** This is the average annual (trailing-12-month) EPS growth rate over the last 3-5 years. This metric helps investors see how a company's EPS has grown from a long-term perspective.

Note: There are many factors that can influence short-term numbers — a recession will reduce this number, while a recovery will inflate it. The longterm perspective helps smooth out short-term events.

**Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0):** This is the estimated EPS growth rate for the current financial year. It is calculated as the consensus estimate for the current fiscal year (F1) divided by the reported EPS for the last completed fiscal year (F0).

**Current Cash Flow Growth:** It measures the latest year-over-year change in operating cash flow. Cash flow growth tells an investor how quickly a company is generating inflows of cash from operations. A positive change in the cash flow is desired and shows that more 'cash' is coming in than going out.

**Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years):** This is the annualized change in cash flow over the last 3-5 years. The change in a longer period helps put the current reading into proper perspective. By looking at the rate, rather than the actual dollar value, the comparison across the industry and peers becomes easier.

**Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0):** This metric looks at the estimated sales growth for the current year. It is calculated as sales estimate for the current fiscal year (F1) divided by the reported sales for the last completed fiscal year (F0).

Like EPS growth, a higher rate is better for sales growth. A look at a company's projected sales growth instantly tells you what the outlook is for their products and services. However, different sales growth rates are considered good for different industries, so it's better to compare sales growth rates of companies in the same industry group.

**EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change:** The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past week. The change in a company's consensus EPS estimate (or earnings estimate revision) has proven to be strongly correlated with the near-term price movement of its shares. It is an integral part of the Zacks Rank.

If a stock's consensus EPS estimate is $1.10 now versus $1.00 a week ago, that will be reflected as a 10% upward revision. If, on the other hand, it went from $1.00 to 90 cents, that would be a 10% downward revision.

**EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change:** The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past four weeks.

A stock's earnings estimate revision in a 1-week period is important. But it's more meaningful to look at the longer-term revision. And, of course, the 4-week change helps put the 1-week change into proper perspective.

**EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change:** The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past 12 weeks.

This metric essentially shows how the consensus EPS estimate has changed over a period longer than 1 week or 4 weeks.

**EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change:** The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal quarter over the past four weeks.

While the revision in consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year is strongly correlated with the near-term price movement of its shares, the estimate revision for the current fiscal quarter is an important metric as well, especially over the short term, and particularly as a stock approaches its earnings date. If a stock's Q1 EPS estimate decreases ahead of its earnings release, it's usually a negative sign, whereas an increase is a positive sign.