

American Express (AXP)

\$98.17 (As of 09/21/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$103.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 05/27/20)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

3-Hold

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:B

Value: B

Growth: D

Momentum: A

Summary

American Express' strategic initiatives will help it achieve growth and recover from the current bleak market environment. It has slowed down the development and launch of some products that was in the pipeline this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A decline in marketing expenses and card member service is likely to drive margin expansion. Its shares have underperformed its industry year to date. Nevertheless, maintenance of sufficient capital will provide flexibility to support business growth. Adequate capital levels enable it to undertake shareholder-friendly moves via dividend hikes and share buybacks. However, due to the pandemic, the company is witnessing lower spending volumes, which are likely to hurt its full-year operating performance. Drained profitability and stressed revenues might continue, given the adverse operating scenario.

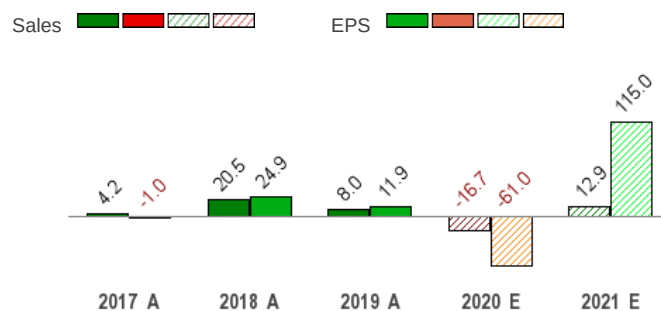
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$138.13 - \$67.00
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	4,072,495
Market Cap	\$79.0 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	-21.1%
Beta	1.15
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$1.72 / 1.8%
Industry	Financial - Miscellaneous Services
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 35% (162 out of 251)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	123.1%
Last Sales Surprise	-2.9%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	2.8%
Expected Report Date	10/16/2020
Earnings ESP	6.4%
P/E TTM	15.4
P/E F1	30.7
PEG F1	2.9
P/S TTM	2.0

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	9,798 E	9,979 E	10,475 E	11,167 E	40,971 E
2020	10,310 A	7,675 A	8,801 E	9,568 E	36,303 E
2019	10,364 A	10,838 A	10,989 A	11,365 A	43,556 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	\$1.37 E	\$1.66 E	\$2.03 E	\$2.23 E	\$6.88 E
2020	\$1.98 A	\$0.29 A	\$1.29 E	\$1.25 E	\$3.20 E
2019	\$2.01 A	\$2.07 A	\$2.08 A	\$2.03 A	\$8.20 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 09/21/2020. The reports text is as of 09/22/2020.

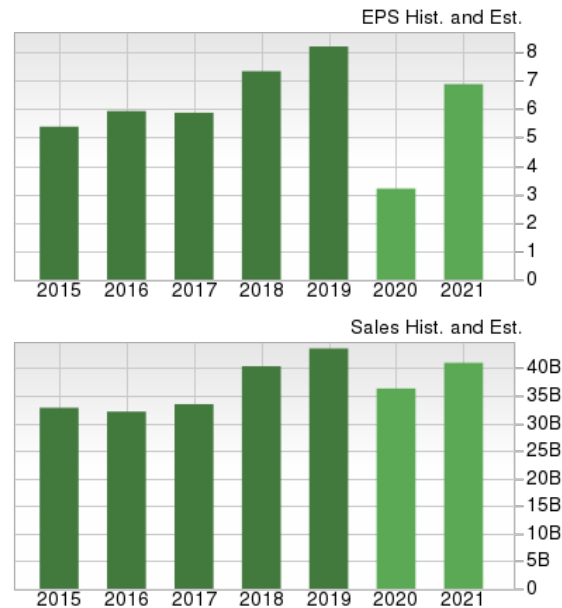
Overview

Founded in 1850, NY-based American Express Company is a diversified financial services company, offering charge and credit payment card products, and travel-related services worldwide. American Express and its main subsidiary – American Express Travel Related Services Company, Inc. (“TRS”) – are bank holding companies under the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956. The company offers business travel-related services through its non-consolidated joint venture, American Express Global Business Travel (the GBT JV).

The company's range of products and services include charge card, credit card and other payment and financing products; Merchant acquisition and processing, servicing and settlement, and point-of-sale marketing and information products and services for merchants; Network services; other fee services, including fraud prevention services and the design and operation of customer loyalty programs; Expense management products and services and Travel-related services.

The company's reporting segments are as follows:

- **Global Consumer Services Group (GCSG)**, (53% of 2019 total net revenues) including proprietary consumer cards globally, consumer services including travel services and non-card financing products, certain international joint ventures and the company's partnership agreements in China;
- **Global Commercial Services (GCS)**, (31%) offers a wide range of card and payment programs, expense management tools, consulting services, business financing and cross-border payments solutions to small businesses, mid-size companies and large corporations around the world.
- **Global Merchant and Network Services (GMNS)**, (16%) operate a global payments network that processes and settles card transactions, acquires merchants and provides fraud-prevention tools, marketing solutions, data analytics and other programs and services to merchants that leverage the capabilities of the company's integrated network.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

▲ **Share Price Movement:** American Express' shares have underperformed its industry year to date. Nevertheless, its progress on fundamentals is likely to drive the stock's steady performance in the quarters ahead.

▲ **Decrease in Marketing Expense:** The company has been witnessing increase in marketing and business development expenses for a while now with a 13% rise in 2018 and a further 10% jump in 2019 due to higher spending on growth initiatives including new card acquisition, global brand campaign, continued investments in co-brand partnerships and higher corporate client incentives.

However, for now, given the COVID-19 fallout, the company halted traditional advertising, marketing, sponsorships and customer-acquisition activities. It is also slowing down the development launches of some products that the company had in pipeline this year. This will decline marketing expenses in the current year, which were down 22% in the first six months of 2020, aiding margins in the process, especially at a time when revenue growth is hard to achieve.

▲ **Decrease in Card Member Services and Card Member Rewards:** The company has been experiencing a rise in Reward expenses and card member services for the past many years. These two categories constitute nearly 40% of the company total expenses. However, these expenses declined in the first half of 2020. While card member rewards fell due to decrease in billed business, card member services were down due to decrease in usage of travel-related benefits following the COVID-19-related travel restrictions. This decline in card member rewards and card member services is expected to continue for some time now, given the uncertainty related to COVID-19, which will continue to minimize billed business and travel. A decline in the expense category will in turn, aid the bottom line.

▲ **Favorable Debt Ratings:** The company's unsecured debt carries investment grade ratings with a stable outlook from Moody's and S&P. Its investment grade rating along with a stable outlook places it in a favorable position to secure funding at reasonable costs and keep intact its borrowing capacity.

▲ **Adequate Capital Levels and Capital Return:** In 2019, the company returned nearly 25% of total capital generated via dividend and share repurchase. Also, the company's risk based capital ratio of 16.5% (as of Jun 30, 2020) is higher than the Basel III Standards of 10.5%. Maintenance of sufficient level of capital will provide flexibility to support future business growth.

Recently, the company increased its dividend by 10% to 43 cents. Its dividend payout ratio of nearly 20% is quite low and implies that dividend payout ratio has more room for upside, going forward. Also, the company's dividend has been stable over the past 10 years, which reflects its resilience to the business and its dividends. The company's long payment history and low payout ratio makes American Express an attractive dividend paying stock.

Decrease in marketing expense, cost of rewards and card member services, favorable debt ratings, and solid balance sheet are some of the positives.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ **Revenue Growth to Remain Stressed:** The company's revenues have been increasing since 2016, led by a number of growth initiatives, such as launching products, enhancing the existing features, modifying price, reaching agreements and forging alliances among others. However, the COVID-19-led fall in business volumes, which hurt the company's cross border as well as domestic business is likely to weigh on the company's full year revenues. In the first six months of 2020, revenues declined 15% year over year.
- ▼ **Increase in Provision:** Provisions for credit losses in the first half of 2020 increased due to a significant reserve build that reflected the deterioration of the estimated global macroeconomic outlook as a result of the COVID-19 impact. The latest macroeconomic view mirrors a more significant downside in the United States Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and unemployment. If economic factors worsen going into the second half of 2020, the company is likely to have another large reserve build up.
- ▼ **Decline in Profitability:** The company's return on equity at the end of the first half of 2020 was down 1350 basis points year over year. The company also suspended share repurchases to maintain its financial strength, given the high level of uncertainty in the business environment. Given a difficult operating environment, we expect profitability to remain under pressure in the coming quarters.
- ▼ **High Debt and Interest Coverage:** The company's debt to equity level of 231.7% has remained stable over the past many years although it lies above the industry's average of 156.7%. Moreover, its interest earned ratio of 4.3x is weaker than the industry average of 4.9x. The company's long-term debt and liabilities of \$73.4 billion are higher than its cash and cash equivalents of \$41.5 billion. The company's higher-than-average debt position and weaker debt servicing capacity raises financial risk.

Pressure on revenue growth, decline in profitability, suspension of share buyback, high debt level and reduced interest payment capability are some of the headwinds facing the company.

Last Earnings Report

American Express Q2 Earnings Beat Estimates, Decline Y/Y

American Express' second-quarter 2020 earnings of 29 cents per share, beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 123%. However, the bottom line plunged 86% year over year.

The quarter also reflected softness in spending volumes as a result of the adverse COVID-19 impact.

Further, total revenues of \$7.7 billion missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 2.5% and also declined 28.7% year over year. The top line was affected by a drop in Card Member spending and lower average discount rate.

Meanwhile, total expenses of \$5.5 billion decreased 29% year over year owing to lower customer engagement costs on the back of limited Card Member spending as well as controlled usage of travel-related Card Member benefits.

Total provision of \$1.6 billion soared 86% year over year as the company added \$628 million to its capital reserves in a bid to strengthen its balance sheet in the light of a significant deterioration in the global macroeconomic outlook as a result of the coronavirus adversity.

Return on equity of 18.9% declined 1450 basis points year over year.

Lackluster Performance at Segments

American Express' Global Consumer Services segment reported net income of \$527 million, down 40% year over year. Total revenues, net of interest expenses of \$4.6 billion decreased 23% year over year, reflecting a fall in Card Member spending and a lower average discount rate from the prior-year levels.

Global Commercial Services incurred a net loss of \$60 million against net income of \$561 million a year ago. Total revenues, net of interest expenses, were \$2.3 billion. This, in turn, plunged 30.3% year over year, mirroring a decline in Card Member spending and a lower average discount rate.

Global Merchant and Network Services' net income plummeted 88% year over year to \$66 million in the reported quarter. Total revenues and net of interest expenses were down 41% year over year to \$929 million.

Strong Financial Position (as of Jun 30, 2020)

Cash and cash equivalents were \$41 billion, up 52% year over year. Total long-term debt of \$49 billion was down 15.5% year over year.

Quarter Ending 06/2020

Report Date	Jul 24, 2020
Sales Surprise	-2.85%
EPS Surprise	123.08%
Quarterly EPS	0.29
Annual EPS (TTM)	6.38

Recent News

American Express Inks Deal to Acquire Kabbage — Aug 17, 2020

American Express announced that it has inked a deal for acquiring Kabbage, which is a data and technology company offering cash flow management solutions to small businesses across the United States. Subject to customary approval, the agreement is likely to close in later 2020. Per the deal, American Express will take over the team and complete suite of financial technology products, data platform and IP of Kabbage. Addition of Kabbage to American Express' portfolio will enable it to offer improved cash flow management tools and working capital products to several small business clients in the United States.

American Express Launches First Automated Accounts Payable Solution — Jul 15, 2020

The company launched American Express One AP, its first proprietary automated accounts payable (AP) solution that enables U.S. businesses to process supplier payments more easily and efficiently. The new American Express One AP, which is built on the technology acquired as part of the company's purchase of acompany in 2019, offers complete end-to-end payment processing that supports multiple payment methods, including virtual Card payments, check, and ACH. The solution is designed to work seamlessly with businesses' existing accounting systems.

American Express Boosts Small Businesses Hurt by Coronavirus Loss — Jun 30, 2020

In a bid to give some relief to the worst-affected business group, the small and micro business (SMBs), American Express has come forward to provide a much-needed support by committing a \$200-million incentive over the next several months. To help encourage consumers to Shop Small, eligible and enrolled U.S. card members can get back \$5 after they spend \$10 or more at an eligible U.S. small merchant when they shop online, curbside or in-store for maximum 10 times beginning today through Sep 20, 2020. Similar offers are rolling out globally in Australia, Canada and the UK with many more countries like France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico and Spain to follow suit.

Valuation

American Express shares are down 17.6% both in the year-to-date and 14.8% over the trailing 12-month period, respectively. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Finance sector are down 9.2% and 14.2% in the year-to-date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and sector are down 7.4% and 5.1%, respectively.

The S&P 500 index is up 9% in the year-to-date period and up 20.3% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 16.72x forward 12-month earnings, which compares to 13.93x for the Zacks sub-industry, 15.63x for the Zacks sector and 21.58x for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 19.58x and as low as 8.03x, with a 5-year median of 13.37x. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our \$103 price target reflects 17.56x forward earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for AXP

Valuation Multiples - AXP					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	16.72	13.93	15.63	21.58
	5-Year High	19.58	14.15	16.72	23.44
	5-Year Low	8.03	8.7	11.59	15.25
	5-Year Median	13.37	11.58	14.16	17.63
P/S F12M	Current	1.97	1.3	6.04	3.55
	5-Year High	2.62	1.78	6.66	3.55
	5-Year Low	1.2	1.02	4.96	2.53
	5-Year Median	2.12	1.35	6.06	3.02
P/B TTM	Current	3.73	1.87	2.35	4.38
	5-Year High	4.83	2.77	2.91	4.56
	5-Year Low	2.4	1.12	1.71	2.83
	5-Year Median	3.72	1.97	2.53	3.7

As of 09/22/2020 Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 35% (162 out of 251)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Equitable Holdings, Inc. (EQH)	Neutral	3
Globe Life Inc. (GL)	Neutral	3
Orix Corp Ads (IX)	Neutral	3
Jefferies Financial Group Inc. (JEF)	Neutral	3
Mastercard Incorporated (MA)	Neutral	3
Moodys Corporation (MCO)	Neutral	2
Synchrony Financial (SYF)	Neutral	3
Visa Inc. (V)	Neutral	3

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Financial - Miscellaneous Services				Industry Peers		
	AXP	X Industry	S&P 500	EQH	IX	SYF
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	3	3
VGM Score	B	-	-	A	B	A
Market Cap	79.04 B	185.22 M	22.78 B	7.93 B	16.29 B	15.12 B
# of Analysts	10	3	13	3	3	8
Dividend Yield	1.75%	0.00%	1.7%	3.85%	4.98%	3.40%
Value Score	B	-	-	A	B	A
Cash/Price	0.50	0.45	0.07	NA	1.96	1.03
EV/EBITDA	7.49	3.17	12.89	NA	3.20	2.61
PEG F1	2.87	3.20	2.91	NA	3.74	3.20
P/B	3.75	1.00	3.17	NA	0.58	1.35
P/CF	9.77	7.70	12.48	NA	2.98	5.14
P/E F1	30.59	15.94	20.84	4.06	8.20	17.62
P/S TTM	1.96	1.44	2.44	0.39	0.77	0.84
Earnings Yield	3.26%	5.64%	4.53%	24.66%	12.20%	5.68%
Debt/Equity	2.32	0.40	0.70	NA	1.44	1.44
Cash Flow (\$/share)	10.05	0.62	6.93	NA	21.88	5.04
Growth Score	D	-	-	D	A	D
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	9.28%	11.93%	10.41%	NA	98.25%	10.78%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-60.94%	-13.76%	-4.56%	-10.38%	-26.91%	-65.73%
Current Cash Flow Growth	5.23%	5.71%	5.26%	NA	-0.09%	5.34%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	3.21%	12.36%	8.49%	NA	5.66%	9.07%
Current Ratio	1.56	1.51	1.35	NA	1.78	1.24
Debt/Capital	69.85%	30.79%	42.95%	NA	59.13%	57.46%
Net Margin	10.02%	6.85%	10.25%	NA	12.44%	11.79%
Return on Equity	24.08%	7.39%	14.66%	NA	9.31%	14.73%
Sales/Assets	0.21	0.20	0.50	NA	0.18	0.18
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	-16.65%	0.00%	-1.44%	39.41%	-9.10%	-14.30%
Momentum Score	A	-	-	A	F	A
Daily Price Change	-5.09%	-1.26%	-2.45%	-7.60%	-2.32%	-4.88%
1-Week Price Change	0.08%	0.00%	0.79%	-2.70%	1.18%	5.58%
4-Week Price Change	-1.17%	-3.87%	-3.66%	-18.07%	5.65%	2.57%
12-Week Price Change	3.86%	1.33%	5.24%	-7.21%	5.75%	18.00%
52-Week Price Change	-16.97%	-16.76%	-2.08%	-21.04%	-19.20%	-24.09%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	4,072,495	85,105	2,038,285	3,029,188	36,493	4,941,580
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	-2.97%	8.20%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	2.81%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	-3.12%	8.20%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	3.04%	4.76%	4.10%	1.68%	-11.01%	18.07%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	1.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	NA	24.62%

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

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.

Value Score	B
Growth Score	D
Momentum Score	A
VGM Score	B

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.

Disclosures

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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 medium-term 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 most recent 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 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.