

Bank of America (BAC)

\$31.77 (As of 01/21/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$34.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 05/25/20)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

2-Buy

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:F

Value: F

Growth: F

Momentum: A

Summary

Bank of America's shares have outperformed the industry over the past year. Its earnings surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate in two of the trailing four quarters. Its fourth-quarter 2020 results reflect solid capital markets performance, lower credit costs and adverse impact of lower rates and dismal consumer banking performance. Opening of new branches, improvement in digital offerings and efforts to manage costs are likely to aid profitability. Also, a strong balance sheet and liquidity position are expected to continue aiding its financials. However, near-zero interest rates and no near-term chance of any change in the same are expected to keep hurting the bank's margins and interest income. Coronavirus-induced concerns are likely to further hamper business activities and thus, loan growth is expected to be muted in the near term.

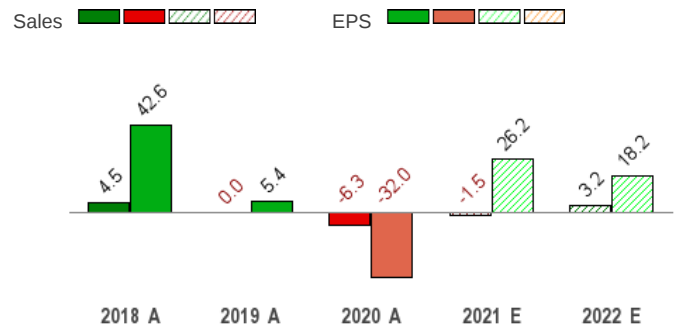
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$35.45 - \$17.95
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	44,918,272
Market Cap	\$274.8 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	4.8%
Beta	1.59
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$0.72 / 2.3%
Industry	Banks - Major Regional
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 11% (27 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	5.4%
Last Sales Surprise	-1.5%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	11.3%
Expected Report Date	04/21/2021
Earnings ESP	3.0%
P/E TTM	17.0
P/E F1	13.5
PEG F1	1.9
P/S TTM	2.9

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	21,436 E	21,618 E	21,882 E	21,584 E	86,996 E
2021	20,929 E	20,868 E	21,065 E	20,740 E	84,277 E
2020	22,767 A	22,326 A	20,336 A	20,099 A	85,528 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	\$0.66 E	\$0.73 E	\$0.71 E	\$0.73 E	\$2.79 E
2021	\$0.57 E	\$0.61 E	\$0.56 E	\$0.58 E	\$2.36 E
2020	\$0.40 A	\$0.37 A	\$0.51 A	\$0.59 A	\$1.87 A

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

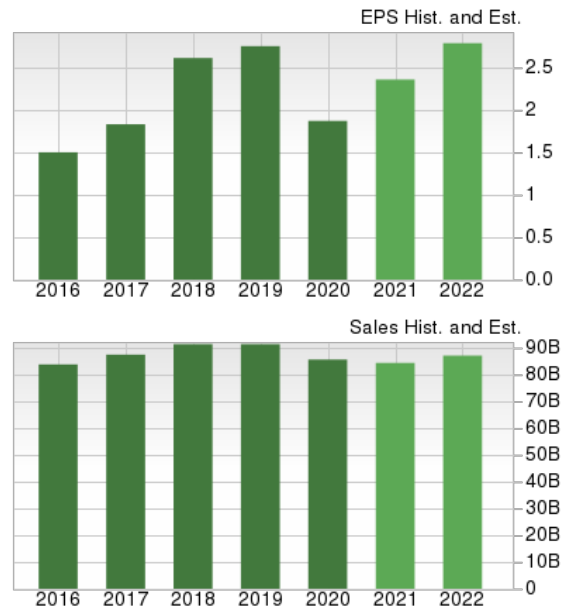
The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and Sales estimates, is as of 01/21/2021. The reports text is as of 01/22/2021.

Overview

Headquartered in Charlotte, NC, Bank of America Corporation (incorporated in 1874) is one of the largest financial holding companies in the United States. With total assets worth \$2.82 trillion as of Dec 31, 2020, it provides a diverse range of banking and non-banking financial services and products.

Bank of America presents results of operations through the following business segments:

- **Consumer Banking** (35.1% of total assets in 2020), comprising Deposits and Consumer Lending businesses, provides a wide range of credit, banking and investment products and services to consumers and businesses.
- **Global Wealth & Investment Management** (13.1%) consisting of Merrill Lynch Global Wealth Management and U.S. Trust, Bank of America Private Wealth Management, offers wealth structuring, investment management, trust and banking needs and specialty asset management services.
- **Global Banking** (20.6%), which includes Global Corporate Banking, Global Commercial Banking, Business Banking and Global Investment Banking, provides lending-related products and services, integrated working capital management and treasury solutions, and underwriting and advisory services.
- **Global Markets** (21.9%) offers sales and trading, market-making, financing, securities clearing, settlement and custody, and risk-management services globally.
- **All Other** (9.3%) consists of ALM activities, equity investments, the international consumer card business, liquidating businesses, residual expense allocations and other.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ Bank of America continues to align its banking center network according to the customer needs. The bank is on track to open 500 new centers in new cities and redesign 2,500 centers with technology upgrades by 2021. The company is opening fully automated branches that will feature automated telling machines (ATMs) and video conferencing facility, allowing customers to communicate with off-site bankers. Further, the company plans to add 2,200 more ATMs to its network. These initiatives, along with the success of Zelle and Erica, has enabled the company to improve digital offerings, and cross sell several products including mortgages, auto loans and credit cards.
- ▲ Bank of America remains focused on acquiring the industry's best deposit franchise and strengthening the loan portfolio. Despite a challenging operating environment, deposits and loan balances have remained strong over the past several years. Though demand for loan has been faltering of late, the same is expected to improve once the economy revives and business activities resume full-fledged.
- ▲ Further, Bank of America's balance sheet position remains solid. As of Dec 31, 2020, the company had total debt of \$523.9 billion, and cash and cash equivalents worth \$308.5 billion. Nonetheless, its fourth-quarter 2020 times-interest-earned ratio of 4.0 improved sequentially. Thus, given the favorable factors and record of consistent earnings strength, the bank has lesser likelihood of default of interest and debt repayments if the economic situation worsens.
- ▲ Further, prudent expense management continues to support Bank of America's financials. Its expense-saving plan – Project New BAC (launched in 2011) – helped improve overall efficiency and save as much as \$8.0 billion in operating expenses annually till the end of 2014. Over the last several quarters, the bank incurred on an average \$14 billion expenses on a quarterly basis, despite undertaking several strategic growth initiatives. The company is likely to manage expenses prudently going forward.
- ▲ Amid the coronavirus-induced economic slowdown, the Federal Reserve had restricted dividends and share repurchases by major banks in order to conserve liquidity. Thus, Bank of America is paying the current dividend of 18 cents per share and did not resume buybacks till December end. Nonetheless, following the Fed's second round of stress test and subsequent approval, it will resume repurchases in first-quarter 2021 and has authorized \$2.9 billion for the same. The bank noted that this is "the maximum allowed for the period, according to guidelines established by the Federal Reserve Board following the results of the latest Comprehensive Capital Analysis and Review examination." Thus, given solid balance sheet position and earnings strength, the bank is expected to be able to sustain capital deployment activities in the future.
- ▲ Shares of Bank of America have outperformed the industry over the past year. Also, the company's earnings estimates for 2021 have been revised 2.7% upward over the past seven days. Thus, given the strong fundamentals and positive estimate revisions, the stock has decent upside potential.

Manageable expense levels, strong balance sheet and expansion into new markets will support Bank of America. Further, technological upgrades are likely to continue aiding cross selling opportunities.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ After slashing interest rates thrice in 2019, the Federal Reserve cut the rates to near zero in March 2020, with an aim of supporting the U.S. economy from coronavirus-induced mayhem. This hurt Bank of America's net interest income (NII) growth and resulted in contraction of net interest yield over the last several quarters. A similar trend is expected to continue in the near term as the central bank has signaled no rate hike at least till 2023. This is likely to hamper overall top-line growth of the company.
- ▼ Further, Bank of America's dependence on capital market performance to generate fee income is a matter of concern. Global economic slowdown amid coronavirus-related mayhem will likely result in extreme volatility in the company's markets and investment banking performances. Though the same improved in 2020, the future performance of this volatility-driven business depends on market developments and client volumes, which remains uncertain. Thus, this is expected to make fee income growth challenging, going forward.
- ▼ Bank of America's trailing 12-month return on equity (ROE) undercuts its growth potential. The company's ROE of 7.32% compares unfavorably with 15.37% for the S&P 500, reflecting the fact that it is less efficient in using shareholder funds.
- ▼ Further, Bank of America seems overvalued than the broader industry. Its current price/sales and price/earnings (F1) ratios are above the respective industry averages.

Near-zero interest rates and coronavirus-related economic slowdown will hamper Bank of America's financials in the upcoming quarters. Further, subdued loan demand is a major near-term concern.

Last Earnings Report

Bank of America Q4 Earnings Beat, Revenues Down Y/Y

Bank of America's fourth-quarter 2020 earnings of 59 cents per share beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate of 56 cents. However, the bottom line was 21% below the prior-year quarter level.

Driven by rise in deal making activities during the fourth quarter, advisory fees jumped 45% from the prior-year quarter. Also, equity underwriting fees surged 141%. Conversely, debt issuance fees fell 10%. Nonetheless, total investment banking fees grew 36%.

Moreover, Bank of America's trading numbers were decent. Sales and trading revenues (excluding DVA) grew 7% from the prior-year quarter. This was driven by 30% surge in equity trading income, while fixed income trading declined 5%.

Backed by improvement in consumer spending, Bank of America witnessed 3% growth in total card income on a year-over-year basis. Further, a substantial reserve release, leading to lower credit costs, supported the company's financials.

However, as expected, a low interest rate environment and soft loan demand hurt Bank of America's net interest income. Additionally, the company recorded a rise in operating expenses.

Furthermore, performance of the company's business segments, in terms of net income generation, was disappointing. All segments, except Global Markets, witnessed a decline in net income. Overall, net income fell 22% from the prior-year quarter to \$5.5 billion.

Lower Rates & Fall in Fee Income Hurt Revenues, Expenses Rise

Net revenues amounted to \$20.1 billion, which missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$20.4 billion. Further, the top line was down 10% on a year-over-year basis.

Net interest income (fully taxable-equivalent basis) declined 16% year over year to \$10.4 billion, mainly due to lower interest rates and fall in loan balance. Also, net interest yield contracted 64 basis points (bps) to 1.71%.

Further, non-interest income decreased 4% from the year-ago quarter to \$9.8 billion.

Non-interest expenses were \$13.9 billion, up 5%.

Efficiency ratio was 69.29%, up from 59.24% in the year-ago quarter. Increase in the efficiency ratio indicates deterioration in profitability.

Credit Quality: Mixed Bag

Provision for credit losses plunged 94% on a year-over-year basis to \$53 million. The fall was mainly due to a reserve release of \$828 million. Also, net charge-offs declined 8% to \$881 million.

As of Dec 31, 2020, non-performing loans and leases were 0.54%, up 18 bps.

Strong Capital Position

The company's book value per share as of Dec 31, 2020 was \$28.72 compared with \$27.32 a year ago. Tangible book value per share as of fourth quarter-end was \$20.60, up from \$19.41. At the end of December 2020, common equity tier 1 capital ratio (Advanced approaches) was 12.9%, up from 11.5% as of Dec 31, 2019.

Outlook

Management expects first-quarter 2020 expenses to include roughly \$350 million for seasonally elevated personnel cost.

The increase in later stage delinquencies is expected to lead to a slight rise in card net charge-offs in the first quarter, which might decline again in the second quarter.

Quarter Ending	12/2020
Report Date	Jan 19, 2021
Sales Surprise	-1.48%
EPS Surprise	5.36%
Quarterly EPS	0.59
Annual EPS (TTM)	1.87

Recent News

BofA's Ratings Affirmed by Moody's, Outlook Stable - Nov 18, 2020

All the long-term and short-term ratings of Bank of America, as well as long-term ratings and assessments of its primary banking subsidiary, Bank of America, N.A., have been affirmed by Moody's Investors Service. Further, the rating outlook for the bank remained unchanged at stable.

The bank's senior debt rating stands at A2. Additionally, Bank of America's short-term deposit rating is unchanged at Prime-1.

Reasons Behind Affirmation

Moody's had upgraded Bank of America's ratings in March 2019. Since then, despite tough operating backdrop and lower rates, the rating agency believes that the bank has shown substantial earnings resilience driven by cost management, investment in technology and diversified business mix. The affirmation also reflects the company's conservative risk appetite, and solid liquidity and funding positions.

Further, Moody's is of the opinion that Bank of America shows "greater resiliency under the Federal Reserve's stress tests than most peers" and the company is primarily focused on better serving its existing clients. Moreover, the company witnessed a substantial fall in "risk-weighted assets (RWAs) under the advanced approaches for operational risk after the Federal Reserve approved its use of an updated model for calculating such RWAs."

The rating agency also took note that Bank of America's capital position has improved since the start of pandemic in March. This is mainly driven by suspension of share repurchases and "a relatively low dividend payout." Lower operational risk RWAs too provided support to its capital position. Yet, once the regulatory restrictions on capital deployments are lifted, Bank of America will likely boost payout and thus, its capital ratios will decline from the current level.

Also, the company is more adversely impacted by lower interest rates compared with its peers. Further, in the first three quarters of 2020, Bank of America's non-interest income remained almost stable. Hence, the company's adjusted pre-tax pre-provision profits for the aforesaid period fell 18% year over year. Yet, despite the decline, this provided sufficient cushion to absorb a significant rise in Bank of America's credit provisions amid coronavirus-induced economic slowdown and adoption of the Current Expected Credit Losses accounting standard.

Moody's noted that though Bank of America might have to build additional reserves in case economic recovery falters, its sufficient pre-tax pre-provision earnings are likely to be able to absorb any such rise. The company's earnings are expected to rebound over the medium term, driven by prudent expense management, and growth in client assets and deposits. Its profitability levels are not likely to return to pre-crisis level any time soon owing to lower rates.

What Can Trigger Change in Ratings?

Bank of America's ratings might be upgraded if it is able to continue maintaining tangible common equity of more than 12% of RWAs and reduce its interest rate sensitivity. Also, low reliance on market-based funding will be a positive.

However, ratings could be downgraded if the company's profitability declines and capital or liquidity levels relative to peers worsen. Further, a marked rise in risk appetite and/or an ample operational risk charge or control failure will impact the company's ratings negatively.

Dividend Update

On Jan 19, Bank of America announced a quarterly cash dividend of 18 cents per share. The dividend will be paid out on Mar 26 to shareholders on record as of Mar 5.

Valuation

Bank of America's shares are up 29.5% in the past six months but down 6.9% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Finance sector are up 32% and 23.3% in the past six months, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry is down 10%, while the sector is up 0.6%.

The S&P 500 index is up 20.2% in the past six months and 18% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 14.11X forward 12 months earnings, which compares to 12.81X for the Zacks sub-industry, 17.17X for the Zacks sector and 23.34X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 16.80X and as low as 6.09X, with a 5-year median of 11.29X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in line with the market. Our \$34 price target reflects 15.11X forward earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for BAC

Valuation Multiples - BAC

Stock Sub-Industry Sector S&P 500					
P/E F12M	Current	14.11	12.81	17.17	23.34
	5-Year High	16.8	14.2	17.17	23.79
	5-Year Low	6.09	8.01	11.59	15.3
	5-Year Median	11.29	11.56	14.52	17.83
P/TB TTM	Current	1.58	1.95	3.77	17.07
	5-Year High	2.01	2.68	4.06	17.07
	5-Year Low	0.78	1.21	2.05	7.42
	5-Year Median	1.54	2.11	3.56	10.95
P/S F12M	Current	3.24	3.47	7.14	4.59
	5-Year High	3.66	4.59	7.14	4.59
	5-Year Low	1.33	2.39	5.02	3.2
	5-Year Median	2.82	3.59	6.12	3.68

As of 01/21/2021

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Top 11% (27 out of 253)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Citigroup Inc. (C)	Outperform	3
JPMorgan Chase & Co. (JPM)	Outperform	2
The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc (PNC)	Outperform	1
Wells Fargo & Company (WFC)	Outperform	1
The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation (BK)	Neutral	3
State Street Corporation (STT)	Neutral	2
Truist Financial Corporation (TFC)	Neutral	3
U.S. Bancorp (USB)	Neutral	3

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Banks - Major Regional				Industry Peers		
	BAC	X Industry	S&P 500	C	JPM	WFC
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Outperform	Outperform	Outperform
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	2	-	-	3	2	1
VGM Score	F	-	-	D	F	F
Market Cap	274.84 B	37.45 B	27.31 B	128.81 B	410.99 B	132.30 B
# of Analysts	11	7	13	11	10	13
Dividend Yield	2.27%	2.99%	1.42%	3.30%	2.67%	1.25%
Value Score	F	-	-	D	F	F
Cash/Price	3.11	1.54	0.06	7.32	3.14	3.06
EV/EBITDA	-6.33	0.41	14.84	-12.62	-8.54	-0.94
PEG F1	1.91	1.70	2.56	1.13	2.56	1.32
P/B	1.11	1.11	3.81	0.71	1.65	0.80
P/CF	8.66	9.65	14.61	6.07	9.60	4.83
P/E F1	13.37	12.57	20.74	9.19	12.79	12.77
P/S TTM	2.93	2.79	2.99	1.45	3.17	1.65
Earnings Yield	7.43%	7.95%	4.70%	10.88%	7.82%	7.84%
Debt/Equity	1.06	0.75	0.70	1.50	1.13	1.29
Cash Flow (\$/share)	3.67	6.63	6.93	10.20	14.04	6.63
Growth Score	F	-	-	F	F	F
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	19.27%	9.00%	9.72%	6.07%	11.12%	-22.06%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	26.06%	30.63%	12.61%	37.98%	18.70%	511.07%
Current Cash Flow Growth	3.02%	-4.61%	5.05%	2.56%	9.35%	-1.58%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	27.50%	9.49%	8.36%	7.31%	10.67%	1.85%
Current Ratio	0.84	0.85	1.38	0.97	0.86	0.85
Debt/Capital	49.07%	41.57%	41.88%	57.53%	51.72%	53.39%
Net Margin	19.09%	19.09%	10.40%	13.17%	22.48%	4.11%
Return on Equity	7.32%	8.09%	15.37%	6.63%	12.19%	2.39%
Sales/Assets	0.03	0.04	0.50	0.04	0.04	0.04
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	-1.46%	-2.01%	6.15%	-5.48%	-4.03%	-3.17%
Momentum Score	A	-	-	A	A	A
Daily Price Change	-1.76%	-1.42%	-0.49%	-2.18%	-0.84%	-1.42%
1-Week Price Change	1.48%	0.37%	-0.33%	-1.74%	1.93%	-3.46%
4-Week Price Change	6.04%	7.24%	3.53%	2.15%	8.28%	7.24%
12-Week Price Change	34.96%	38.76%	18.73%	48.51%	38.76%	51.37%
52-Week Price Change	-6.89%	-8.47%	6.82%	-22.47%	-1.25%	-33.64%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	44,918,272	4,347,279	1,623,841	18,170,320	13,320,462	34,232,696
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	6.23%	1.15%	0.00%	4.81%	7.73%	8.89%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	11.34%	9.17%	0.13%	9.17%	14.03%	22.91%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	17.01%	17.01%	2.09%	22.19%	21.27%	33.32%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	9.10%	6.27%	0.00%	5.08%	15.93%	13.32%

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	F
Growth Score	F
Momentum Score	A
VGM Score	F

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 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.