

Cogent Communications (COI)

\$60.17 (As of 01/06/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$64.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 11/03/20)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

3-Hold

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:D

Value: D

Growth: C

Momentum: C

Summary

Cogent's On-Network segment is a key growth driver, as it generates considerable revenues and serves a range of corporate as well as net-centric customers. The company primarily benefits from its cost-effective operations, supported by efficient network expansion and pricing flexibility. Low-churn corporate customers aid in generating positive cash flow with accretive customer connections. Cogent's pervasive and interconnected network provides it a competitive edge over rivals, which helps it enhance margins. However, foreign exchange woes and intense competition weigh on its margins. The company's business gets majorly affected by decline in the development of new applications and businesses that make significant usage of its Internet services. Radical technological changes and patent infringement are other major headwinds.

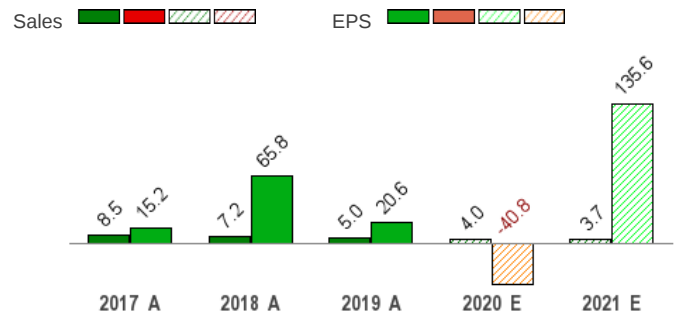
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$92.43 - \$53.20
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	385,132
Market Cap	\$2.8 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	0.5%
Beta	0.10
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$2.92 / 4.9%
Industry	Wireless National
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 36% (92 out of 254)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	4.6%
Last Sales Surprise	-0.6%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.0%
Expected Report Date	02/25/2021
Earnings ESP	0.0%
P/E TTM	70.0
P/E F1	56.8
PEG F1	7.5
P/S TTM	5.0

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	145 E	146 E	148 E	151 E	589 E
2020	141 A	141 A	142 A	144 E	568 E
2019	134 A	135 A	137 A	140 A	546 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	\$0.25 E	\$0.28 E	\$0.31 E	\$0.34 E	\$1.06 E
2020	\$0.20 A	\$0.18 A	\$0.23 A	\$0.18 E	\$0.45 E
2019	\$0.20 A	\$0.16 A	\$0.30 A	\$0.25 A	\$0.76 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 01/06/2021. The reports text is as of 01/07/2021.

Overview

Founded in 1999 and based in Washington, DC, Cogent Communications Holdings Inc. is a Tier 1 Internet Service Provider (ISP) that offers low-cost high-speed Internet access, private network services and colocation center services with ultra-low latency data transmission. The company provides its services to more than 204 major markets and interconnect with more than 6,840 other networks, spanning across North America, Europe Asia, Latin America and Australia. It addresses the dynamic needs of various small and medium-sized businesses, ISPs and other bandwidth-intensive organizations with the help of efficient network expansion and integration execution.

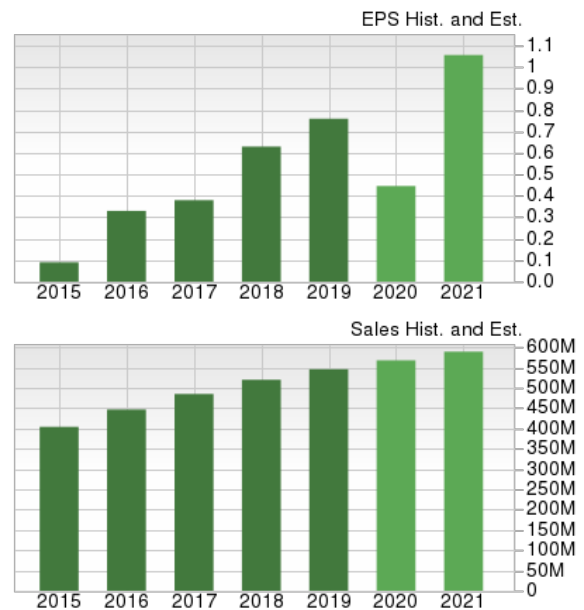
Cogent's network comprises metropolitan optical networks, in-building riser facilities, inter-city transport facilities and metropolitan traffic aggregation points. It transmits low cost packet switched traffic over a reliable and secure network compared with traditional circuit-switched telephone networks. Its network infrastructure encompasses 1,735 multi-tenant office buildings, 889 carrier-neutral Internet aggregation facilities and single-tenant buildings, 804 intra-city networks consisting of 32,946 fiber miles and an inter-city network of 57,426 fiber route miles.

By type of network service, Cogent generates significant revenues from two types of Internet access services — On-Net services and Off-Net services.

On-Net services (73.9% of total service revenues in third-quarter 2020):

On-Net services are provided to corporate and net-centric customers located in buildings that are physically connected to its network by Cogent facilities. Corporate customers include financial services, law firms, advertising and marketing and other professional services businesses. Net-centric customers include telephone firms, cable television, ISPs and commercial content and application service providers.

Off-Net services (26.1%): Off-Net services are provided to customers located in buildings that are connected to Cogent's network using other carriers' facilities and services by means of "last mile" or local access service lines from the customers' premises. These services are delivered to small and medium-sized corporate customers in more than 6,650 off-net buildings with major presence in the metropolitan markets of North America and Europe.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ Being a leading provider of high-speed Internet access, Cogent benefits from cost-effective operations. The company offers a streamlined set of products, which help in eliminating redundant costs and give greater pricing flexibility. It incurs relatively lower costs compared with competitors owing to the usage of Internet routers without additional legacy equipment. Backed by efficient network expansion and integration execution, it also offers high-quality Internet service due to the highly economical metro and intercity network infrastructure. Its seamless network delivers high throughput, which reduces the frequency of data packets dropped during transmission compared with traditional circuit-switched networks, thereby creating a more reliable and robust network infrastructure.
- ▲ Operating as one of the most interconnected Tier 1 networks in the world, Cogent provides efficient on-network and off-network connectivity solutions to various Enterprise segments, including financial companies, educational institutions and law firms at affordable costs. In the last reported quarter, on-net revenues increased 5.7% to \$105.1 million, primarily driven by growth in on-net customer connections. The company offers state-of-the art colocation data center services that provide incessant power supply and backup generators, making it ideal for disaster recovery and data backup. Its data centers are popularly known for providing a conducive environment for coherent connectivity, security, availability and performance to its end customers. High-speed bandwidth and dedicated Internet access remain the highest priority backed by a team of committed customer support and local provisioning teams to clinch maximum reliability. In the third quarter of 2020, the company registered 88,509 customer connections compared with 85,692 in the year-ago quarter. The 3.3% increase was backed by improvement in both on-net and off-net customer connection tallies.
- ▲ Cogent has a high traffic network footprint across major multi-tenant office buildings in North American cities and carrier neutral colocation centers in North America and Europe, delivering high levels of Internet traffic. Its pervasive and interconnected network gives a competitive edge over its rivals, which helps in augmenting its revenue opportunities and margins. Its end-to-end optical transport network and advanced routing technology provide reliable and scalable network services and connect Cogent's significant markets throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Moreover, its augmented geographical footprint also accelerates acquisition opportunities, thereby increasing its customer base. This, in turn, offers high-quality, low-churn corporate customers, which aids in generating positive cash flow with proliferating customer connections.
- ▲ As of Sep 30, 2020, the company had \$393 million in cash and cash equivalents with \$95 million of total current liabilities compared with the respective tallies of \$417 million and \$100 million at the end of the previous quarter. This suggests that Cogent is likely to pay off its short-term financial obligations. Despite a debt-to-capital ratio of 1.3 compared with 0.5 of the industry, Cogent's times interest earned (TIE) ratio has improved over the past few quarters and is currently pegged at 1.5. This indicates that the company is in a position to meet its debt obligations. Its dividend payout rate has increased to 312.2% from 279.6% in the previous quarter.

Cogent's cost-effective operations, enhanced data centers and augmented network infrastructure make it well poised to generate higher revenues for long-term growth.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ Cogent offers its services in a highly competitive environment, wherein it requires establishing and maintaining profitable relationships with other companies. These include customers who connect their network by buying Internet access from the company or major ISPs with whom it works on a settlement-free peering basis. This, in turn, stresses its margins as the company has to incur high operating costs in order to maintain its network infrastructure. Moreover, the need to maintain accretive customer base is also dependent on a number of factors like pricing of product offerings, sales and marketing and turnover generated from customer connections. Hence, in order to generate maximum revenues, Cogent is not only incumbent to augment its customer base but also increase its networking capacity, which could otherwise impair its growth.
- ▼ Cogent's network infrastructure equipment is significantly manufactured and provided by a single network infrastructure vendor — Cisco. This increases operating risks and makes it susceptible to service outages. Also, migrating from Cisco to any other vendor would be perilous as it involves a lot of time and effort to install and operate new vendor's equipment. This, in turn, amplifies the costs and reduces the operational efficacy, thereby hampering its overall financial condition. Further, due to the prevailing cases of technological changes and patent infringement in the communications industry, Cogent experiences multiple disruptions, thereby often failing to operate as a multi-vendor network.
- ▼ Due to its augmented network footprint in various regions, Cogent is susceptible to encounter numerous economic risks. As it primarily operates in North America and Europe, any economic downturn in these regions negatively hampers its growth. Off-net revenues slipped 0.9% to \$37.1 million from \$37.4 million in the year-ago quarter. The company's business gets majorly affected due to decline in the development of new applications and businesses that make significant usage of its Internet services. Moreover, due to its international exposure, fluctuations in foreign exchange rates also hinder its financial position and operational activities. It is exposed to regulatory and legal requirements like import restrictions, tariffs, trade barriers, exchange controls, privacy and data protection and adverse tax regimes.

Complex peering relationships, intense competition and foreign exchange vulnerabilities have significantly weakened its competitive position in the global market.

Last Earnings Report

Cogent Q3 Earnings Beat Estimates, Revenues Up Y/Y

Cogent reported mixed third-quarter 2020 financial results, with the top line missing the Zacks Consensus Estimate but the bottom line beating the same.

Bottom Line

Net loss in the September quarter came in at \$5 million or loss of 11 cents per share against net income of \$13.7 million or 30 cents per share in the year-earlier quarter. Despite top-line growth, the year-over-year deterioration was primarily caused by higher operating expenses and adverse foreign exchange translation.

Adjusted earnings for the reported quarter were 23 cents per share, which beat the consensus estimate by a penny.

Revenues

Quarterly service revenues were \$142.3 million compared with \$136.9 million in the year-ago quarter. On a constant-currency basis, the 3.1% increase was backed by higher on-net revenues. However, the top line lagged the consensus estimate of \$143 million. Also, owing to COVID-19 induced challenges, Cogent witnessed a decline in sales productivity as new potential customers delayed the purchase of services, while existing customers reduced their number of secondary service locations.

On-net revenues increased 5.7% to \$105.1 million from \$99.4 million in the year-ago quarter. The increase was primarily driven by 3.3% growth in on-net customer connections. On-net service is provided to customers located in buildings that are physically connected to Cogent's network by its facilities. The number of on-net buildings increased by 113 year over year to 2,884 as of Sep 30.

Off-net revenues slipped 0.9% to \$37.1 million from \$37.4 million in the year-ago quarter. Off-net customers are located in buildings directly connected to the company's network using other carriers' facilities.

Other Details

Total operating expenses were \$115.9 million compared with \$111.2 million in the prior-year quarter led by higher amortization and selling, general and administrative expenses. Operating income was \$26 million, up from \$25.8 million. Adjusted EBITDA totaled \$54.7 million compared with \$50.6 million in the year-ago quarter for respective margins of 38.4% and 37%.

During third-quarter 2020, the company registered 88,509 customer connections compared with 85,692 in the year-ago quarter. The 3.3% increase was backed by improvement in both on-net and off-net customer connection tallies.

Despite the global pandemic, Cogent hiked its dividend for the 33rd consecutive quarter, which indicates its robust cash flow position. The company increased its quarterly dividend by 2.5 cents per share to 73 cents for fourth-quarter 2020. The amount is payable on Dec 4 to shareholders on record as of Nov 20.

Cash Flow & Liquidity

During the first nine months of 2020, Cogent's net cash from operating activities was relatively flat at \$102.7 million. As of Sep 30, 2020, the company had \$393.3 million in cash and cash equivalents with total current liabilities of \$95.2 million.

Going Forward

Due to the current macroeconomic headwinds triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, Cogent has stated that it is likely to encounter financial difficulties in the near term coupled with a significant downward trend in customer orders, supply chain disruptions, lower corporate installs and reduced customer connections. Backed by the current work-from-home trend amid COVID-19 induced lockdown, the company witnessed a positive impact on net-centric revenues in the reported quarter. Nevertheless, the company expects the global economic disturbance and government restrictions to have a negative impact on its business operations in the long run.

Quarter Ending	09/2020
Report Date	Nov 05, 2020
Sales Surprise	-0.62%
EPS Surprise	4.55%
Quarterly EPS	0.23
Annual EPS (TTM)	0.86

Valuation

Cogent's shares are down 13.1% in the trailing 12-month period and down 25.9% in the past six months. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry are up 0.1% in the past year and up 5.2% in the past six months. Stocks in the Zacks Computer and Technology sector are up 34.4% in the past year and up 19.8% in the past six months.

The S&P 500 Index is up 17.1% in the past year and up 19.1% in the past six months.

The stock is currently trading at 16.23X trailing 12-month EV/EBITDA, which compares to 6.37X for the Zacks sub-industry, 16.05X for the Zacks sector and 16.98X for the S&P 500 Index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 26X and as low as 13.12X, with a 5-year median of 16X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in line with the market. Our \$64 price target reflects 1.13X forward 12-month earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for CCOI

Valuation Multiples - CCOI					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
EV/EBITDA TTM	Current	16.23	6.37	16.05	16.98
	5-Year High	26	11.56	16.52	17.02
	5-Year Low	13.12	5.27	8.25	9.56
	5-Year Median	16	6.6	12.08	13.21
P/E F12M	Current	56.71	12.91	27.91	22.98
	5-Year High	117.9	15	27.96	23.79
	5-Year Low	44.91	9.97	16.94	15.3
	5-Year Median	61.41	12.4	19.93	17.82
P/S F12M	Current	4.82	1.64	4.8	4.46
	5-Year High	7.21	1.67	4.8	4.46
	5-Year Low	3.08	1.22	2.77	3.21
	5-Year Median	4.16	1.48	3.47	3.67

As of 01/06/2021

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Top 36% (92 out of 254)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
ATN International, Inc. (ATNI)	Neutral	3
Cambium Networks Corporation (CMBM)	Neutral	3
Gogo Inc. (GOGO)	Neutral	2
Lumen Technologies, Inc. (LUMN)	Neutral	3
TMobile US, Inc. (TMUS)	Neutral	3
Telenav, Inc. (TNAV)	Neutral	3
United States Cellular Corporation (USM)	Neutral	1
Verizon Communications Inc. (VZ)	Neutral	3

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Wireless National				Industry Peers		
	CCOI	X Industry	S&P 500	ATNI	CMBM	GOGO
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	3	2
VGM Score	D	-	-	A	B	B
Market Cap	2.84 B	449.69 M	26.57 B	765.83 M	656.34 M	872.96 M
# of Analysts	5	5	13	2	5	2
Dividend Yield	4.85%	0.00%	1.44%	1.41%	0.00%	0.00%
Value Score	D	-	-	B	C	C
Cash/Price	0.14	0.14	0.06	0.21	0.08	0.14
EV/EBITDA	18.20	7.84	14.91	6.82	79.06	15.13
PEG F1	7.55	2.87	2.65	NA	1.20	NA
P/B	NA	1.14	3.70	0.97	12.96	NA
P/CF	24.32	7.57	14.31	8.44	153.37	23.40
P/E F1	57.04	23.99	20.47	74.11	23.99	NA
P/S TTM	5.04	1.50	2.96	1.73	2.53	1.53
Earnings Yield	1.76%	2.36%	4.77%	1.35%	4.15%	-0.59%
Debt/Equity	-4.02	0.48	0.70	0.10	0.93	-1.74
Cash Flow (\$/share)	2.47	3.96	6.93	5.70	0.17	0.44
Growth Score	C	-	-	B	A	A
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	42.60%	6.41%	9.71%	-32.56%	NA	NA
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	137.02%	3.41%	12.15%	288.41%	35.03%	97.58%
Current Cash Flow Growth	3.99%	3.99%	5.22%	-14.75%	-47.20%	299.85%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	9.91%	7.03%	8.33%	-2.08%	NA	33.75%
Current Ratio	4.99	1.43	1.38	1.70	1.86	1.80
Debt/Capital	NA%	43.96%	41.97%	9.14%	48.19%	NA
Net Margin	3.60%	3.60%	10.40%	-0.76%	2.70%	-48.02%
Return on Equity	-17.36%	9.82%	15.07%	0.68%	21.92%	NA
Sales/Assets	0.59	0.47	0.50	0.40	1.49	0.51
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	3.77%	3.78%	5.91%	11.83%	14.09%	-27.71%
Momentum Score	C	-	-	B	D	F
Daily Price Change	5.06%	0.72%	2.11%	6.67%	3.78%	1.19%
1-Week Price Change	0.52%	0.00%	1.16%	-6.16%	-6.38%	-4.94%
4-Week Price Change	1.97%	0.54%	2.33%	2.60%	1.75%	-8.90%
12-Week Price Change	-3.08%	8.91%	12.27%	0.31%	44.73%	-0.53%
52-Week Price Change	-13.10%	-0.27%	7.29%	-15.70%	180.24%	81.88%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	385,132	176,022	1,691,401	56,056	407,000	2,186,199
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.45%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.05%	27.45%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	-13.25%	11.77%	2.53%	303.13%	15.77%	96.99%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	-3.33%	0.00%	0.00%

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Zacks Stock Rating System

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

Zacks Recommendation

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

Zacks Rank

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

Zacks Style Scores

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	D
Growth Score	C
Momentum Score	C
VGM Score	D

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

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

4-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 20 trading days or past 4 weeks. This is a 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.