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Sep 21, 2020

CME Group Inc. (CME)

$169.05 (As of 09/18/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **$142.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months	**Zacks Recommendation:** (Since: 07/30/20) Prior Recommendation: Neutral	**Underperform**
Short Term: 1-3 Months	**Zacks Rank:** (1-5)	**4-Sell**
	Zacks Style Scores:	VGM:F
	Value: D | Growth: C	Momentum: F

Summary

Shares of CME Group have underperformed its industry year to date. Escalating expenses due to higher technology cost are likely to put pressure on margin expansion. Diversified product portfolio is significantly exposed to volatile interest rate, firm government regulations and limited credit availability in unstable capital and credit market. Stiff competition also poses financial risk. Nonetheless, strong market position driven by varied derivative product lines bodes well. Efforts to expand and cross sell through strategic alliances, acquisitions, new product initiatives and a stable global presence bode well. Product innovation and growing proportion of volume from customers outside the United States have been aiding results. It intends to focus more on over-the-counter clearing services. CME's second-quarter earnings beat estimates.

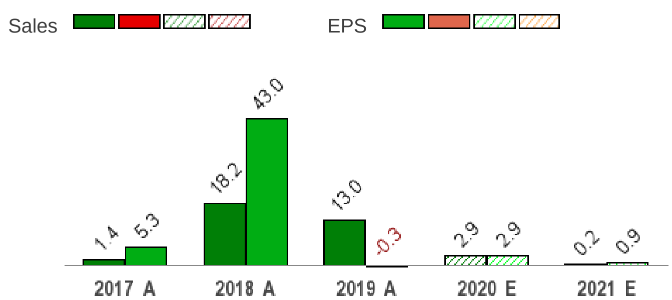
Price, Consensus & Surprise

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	$225.36 - $131.80
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	1,467,075
Market Cap	$60.5 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	-15.8%
Beta	0.30
Dividend / Dividend Yield	$3.40 / 2.0%
Industry	Securities and Exchanges
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 24% (191 out of 251)
Last EPS Surprise	0.6%
Last Sales Surprise	-1.1%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	-0.1%
Expected Report Date	11/04/2020
Earnings ESP	-2.6%
P/E TTM	22.9
P/E F1	24.2
PEG F1	4.6
P/S TTM	11.8

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Sales Estimates (millions of $)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	1,262 E	1,266 E	1,275 E	1,267 E	5,019 E
2020	1,522 A	1,182 A	1,134 E	1,172 E	5,009 E
2019	1,180 A	1,273 A	1,277 A	1,138 A	4,868 A

EPS Estimates

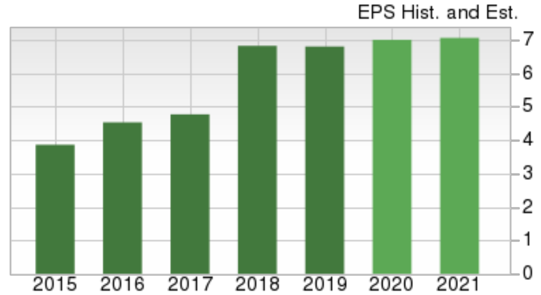
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	$1.87 E	$1.78 E	$1.83 E	$1.75 E	$7.06 E
2020	$2.33 A	$1.63 A	$1.48 E	$1.56 E	$7.00 E
2019	$1.62 A	$1.76 A	$1.90 A	$1.52 A	$6.80 A

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

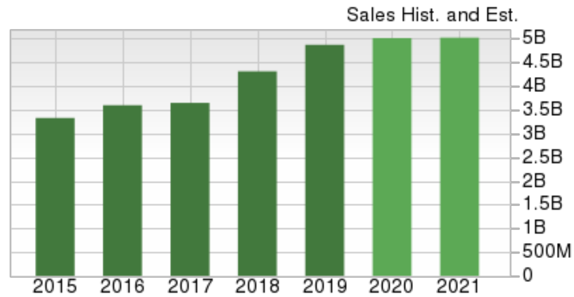
The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and Sales estimates, is as of 09/18/2020. The reports text is as of 09/21/2020.

Overview

Formed in 2007 by the merger of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) and the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT), CME Group is the largest futures exchange in the world in terms of trading volume as well as notional value traded. The Chicago Mercantile Exchange was originally formed as a non-profit organization in 1898, but was converted to a for-profit company in 2000. It became the first publicly traded financial exchange in the U.S. in Dec 2002. CBOT, established in 1848, is a leading futures and options exchange. In Apr 2005, CBOT converted into a for-profit stock-based holding company and for-profit membership exchange subsidiary.



CME Group offers a broad range of products covering major asset classes, based on interest rates, equity indexes, foreign exchange, energy, agricultural commodities and metals. Trades are executed through CME Group's electronic trading platforms, open outcry and privately negotiated transactions. CME Group also operates one of the world's leading central counterparty clearing providers through CME Clearing and CME Clearing Europe, which offer clearing and settlement services across asset classes for exchange-traded and over-the-counter derivatives.



Apart from CME and CBOT, the company operates New York Mercantile Exchange, Inc. (NYMEX) and Commodity Exchange, Inc. (COMEX), CME Clearing Europe Limited (CMECE) and CME Europe Limited (CME Europe). The company reports the results of its operations as one operating segment mainly comprised of CME, CBOT, NYMEX and COMEX.

CME Group's 81.1% revenues were derived from clearing and transaction fees in 2019. These fees include electronic trading fees, surcharges for privately negotiated transactions and other volume-related charges for exchange-traded and cleared swaps contracts. The company's product line includes **Interest-rate** trading, **Energy and Equity** trading contracts, **Foreign exchange, Agricultural commodities** and **Metal**.

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Sell:

The ongoing weakness in derivative markets, escalating costs, exposure to interest rate volatility, currency fluctuation and intense competition remain key concerns for CME Group.

- Shares of the company have lost 15.7% year to date, against the industry's decrease of 1.4%. Escalating total expenses, diversified product portfolio significantly exposed to extreme interest rate volatility likely to weigh on share performances.

- CME Group's diversified product portfolio is significantly exposed to extreme interest rate volatility, currency fluctuation, firm government regulations and limited credit availability in the current unstable capital and credit markets, which can hamper liquidity and cause a decline in the customer demand lest this trade scenario continues or worsens in the future. Furthermore, a low interest rate environment in the United States as well as the COVID-19 pandemic is adding to the insurer's woes as it is likely to keep margins under pressure. Although the company has diversified its product array, it is still immensely dependent on trading volumes from two product lines for a significant portion of its clearing and transaction fee revenues, which poses concentration risk.

- Escalating total expenses remain a major concern for CME Group. Expenses have increased in the past few quarters mainly due to higher compensation and benefits, technology expenses, professional fees and outside services, licensing and other fee agreements, depreciation and amortization, and other. However, expenses declined 1.4% in the first half of 2020. For 2020, CME Group expects operating expenses excluding license fees of about $1.595 billion, down from $1.64-$1.65 billion. However, the company estimates higher spending in the next year.

- Finally, the barriers to entry in electronic trading are much lower than in open-outcry markets and create intense competition, which has been affecting both volume and pricing at CME Group. The ongoing consolidation in the industry has raised caution over the sustainability factor of the sturdy groups and poses an uphill task to gain market share. The new clearing house from LME is further likely to heighten competition in the UK. CME Europe is also facing stiff competition from Eurex Exchange in FX trading. Therefore, the company requires aggressive measures to sustain the dynamically changing industry trends.

Risks

- Organic growth has been CME Group's key strength as reflected in its revenue growth story. Revenues witnessed a CAGR of nearly 10% over the last five years (2015-2019). The top line improved 10.3% in first-half 2020, courtesy of higher clearing and transaction fees, market data and information services and other revenues. Also, we believe that the company should retain its revenue momentum in the coming quarters, given its sturdy market position with diverse derivative product lines and global reach. Growth was witnessed globally. Increasing electronic trading volume adds scalability and hence leverage to CME Group's operating model.

- Fundamental growth remains a huge driver for the company's improving operating leverage, through which CME group leads with about 90% market share of the global futures trading and clearing services. In addition to the expansion of futures products in emerging markets, non-transaction related opportunities and over the counter (OTC) offerings should continue to contribute to top-line growth. Its options business too gained traction. The company also notes structural shifts in both the crude and natural gas markets as the U.S. is now becoming the swing producer in these markets and thus expects to capitalize on and benefit from this shift. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is putting the global oil market under pressure, which is already grappling with declining demand and oversupply issues.

- CME Group continuously weighs on strategic initiatives that will accelerate its growth. While in 2018 it shut down London-based derivatives exchange and clearing house, CME Europe and CME Clearing Europe to generate annual savings between $10 million and $12 million and free up over $150 million in capital, it also exited credit default swap clearing business to focus on over-the-counter clearing services on interest rate swaps and foreign exchange. Since its acquired unit NEX Exchange has been incurring losses, the decision of divesting the unit to Aquis Exchange plc also bodes well.

- The company remains focused on making investments, which will make it convenient for clients to trade complex spread options on the box electronically. Currently, the company remains focused on investments in several areas, including organic market data growth and new product extensions and offerings. CME Group continues to maintain a solid liquidity position, with cash and cash equivalents amounting to $1.5 billion as of Jun 30, 2020. The company holds a strong debt profile with no maturities until 2022. It has achieved its target of 1X debt-to-EBITDA in the first quarter only, which it had aimed to achieve by 2020 end. Long-term debt was $3.4 billion at second-quarter end, down 8.1% from the 2019-end level. Further, the company's times interest earned of 18.9 in the second quarter of 2020 was higher than year-ago quarter's figure of 14.7, implying that its earnings are sufficient to cover interest obligations.

- Modest liquidity supports healthy capital deployment via dividend payouts, thereby adding to the company's financial flexibility and investor confidence. CME Group pays five dividends per year with the fifth being variable, which is based on excess cash flow in the year. Since it commenced the variable dividend policy in early 2012, CME Group has returned more than $12 billion in quarterly and variable dividends to its shareholders. It has also been increasing dividend each year, growing at a five-year CAGR of 7.2%. Its dividend yield of 2.1% is better than the industry average of 1.5%, making the stock an attractive pick for yield-seeking investors.

- Most of CME Group's long-term growth investments made in the past are showing desirable upsides. In September 2017, CME Group announced launch of CME FX link, enabling investors to trade on Globex. CME Group continues to launch products to address diverse needs of its customers. In September 2018, the company introduced a new interactive CME Liquidity Tool, allowing the market participants to make an analysis of liquidity, book depth and cost to trade statistics across the CME asset classes. This new tool has already garnered interest from clients worldwide. Also, the company mentioned the extension of the exclusive NASDAQ futures license through 2029, which will provide a seamless access to the NASDAQ product suite to its clients.

Last Earnings Report

CME Group (CME) Q2 Earnings Top Estimates, Revenues Miss

Quarter Ending	06/2020
Report Date	Jul 29, 2020
Sales Surprise	-1.06%
EPS Surprise	0.62%
Quarterly EPS	1.63
Annual EPS (TTM)	7.38

CME Group reported second-quarter 2020 adjusted earnings per share of $1.63, which beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 0.6%. The bottom line decreased 7.4% year over year due to lower clearing and transaction fees. Average daily volume decreased in four out of the six products lines.

Performance in Detail

CME Group's revenues of $1.2 billion decreased 7.1% year over year. The year-over-year decrease is primarily attributable to lower clearing and transaction fees (down 10.6% year over year), partially offset by higher market data and information services (up nearly 5% year over year), and other (up nearly 16% from the prior-year period). The top line missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 1.1%.

Total expenses decreased 5.1% year over year to $544.8 million during the reported quarter, attributable to lower depreciation and amortization as well as other expenses.

Operating income decreased 8.5% from the prior-year quarter to $637.5 million.

Average daily volume decreased 15.9% year over year to 17.6 million contracts in the quarter. Average rate per contract increased 5.5%.

Financial Update

As of Jun 30, 2020, CME Group had $1.5 billion of cash and marketable securities, down 8.6% from 2019 end. As of Jun 30, 2019, long-term debt of $3.4 billion decreased 8.1% from 2018 end.

As of Jun 30, 2020, the company had total assets worth $117.2 billion, up 55.8% from 2019 end.

Capital Deployment

CME Group paid out $304 million in dividends in the second quarter. The company has returned about $13.8 billion to shareholders in the form of dividends since the implementation of the variable dividend policy in early 2012.

Recent News

CME Group Introduces FX Options Vol Converter Tool – Sep 9, 2020

CME Group unveiled FX Options Vol Converter tool to price the company's listed FX options liquidity in over-the-counter (OTC) terms and ensure best execution for trading strategies.

CME Group's August ADV Drops at Five Product Lines – Sep 3, 2020

CME Group's average daily volume of 16.4 million contracts per day in August was down 33% year over year attributable to lower volumes in five of the six product lines. Interest rate volume of 7.2 million contracts per day decreased 48%. Energy volume of 1.9 million contracts decreased 24% year over year. Foreign exchange volumes dropped 11% to 0.7 million contracts per day. Agricultural volume of 1.4 million contracts per day declined 2% year over year. Equity index volume of 4.1 million contracts per day decreased 17%. However, Metals volume of 1 million contracts per day increased 15%.

Valuation

CME Group's shares are down 15.7% and 20.4% in the year-to-date period and over the trailing 12-month period, respectively. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Finance sector are down 1.4% and 17.3% in the year-to-date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and sector are down 2.2% and 12.2%, respectively.

The S&P 500 index is up nearly 3% in the year-to-date period and 11.3% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 24.01x trailing 12-month book value, which compares to 24.18x for the Zacks sub-industry, 16.04x for the Zacks sector and 21.85x for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 31.23x and as low as 18.24x, with a 5-year median of 24.37x. Our Underperform recommendation indicates that the stock will perform worse than the market. Our $142 price target reflects 20.37x earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for CME

Valuation Multiples - CME

		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	24.01	24.18	16.04	21.85
	5-Year High	31.23	27.47	16.72	23.44
	5-Year Low	18.24	18.49	11.6	15.26
	5-Year Median	24.37	22.22	14.27	17.63
P/S F12M	Current	12.06	11.43	6.44	4.04
	5-Year High	16.63	12.94	6.67	4.29
	5-Year Low	7.7	7.27	4.97	3.11
	5-Year Median	12.08	10.53	6.07	3.66
P/B TTM	Current	2.25	3.12	2.5	5.7
	5-Year High	3.06	3.54	2.91	6.17
	5-Year Low	1.34	1.82	1.72	3.75
	5-Year Median	2.31	2.73	2.54	4.85

As of 09/18/2020 *Source: Zacks Investment Research*

Industry Analysis **Zacks Industry Rank:** Bottom 24% (191 out of 251)

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Envestnet, Inc (ENV)	Outperform	1
Cboe Global Markets, Inc. (CBOE)	Neutral	4
Intercontinental Exchange Inc. (ICE)	Neutral	3
Moodys Corporation (MCO)	Neutral	2
MarketAxess Holdings Inc. (MKTX)	Neutral	3
MSCI Inc (MSCI)	Neutral	3
Nasdaq, Inc. (NDAQ)	Neutral	3
OTC Markets Group Inc. (OTCM)	Neutral	2

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Securities And Exchanges

	CME	X Industry	S&P 500	CBOE	ICE	NDAQ
				Industry Peers		
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Underperform	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	4	-	-	4	3	3
VGM Score	F	-	-	B	D	B
Market Cap	60.47 B	20.11 B	23.70 B	9.88 B	53.86 B	20.11 B
# of Analysts	6	6	13	6	6	7
Dividend Yield	2.01%	1.60%	1.63%	1.85%	1.21%	1.60%
Value Score	D	-	-	D	D	D
Cash/Price	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.05
EV/EBITDA	18.68	17.20	13.12	14.26	17.41	16.99
PEG F1	4.51	2.66	2.93	6.24	2.66	2.44
P/B	2.25	3.33	3.26	3.01	3.17	3.49
P/CF	20.78	19.67	12.78	14.02	19.34	19.67
P/E F1	23.72	23.04	21.44	17.46	22.61	20.90
P/S TTM	11.81	7.27	2.49	3.22	7.27	4.10
Earnings Yield	4.14%	4.36%	4.44%	5.72%	4.42%	4.79%
Debt/Equity	0.13	0.20	0.70	0.26	0.45	0.60
Cash Flow ($/share)	8.13	6.22	6.94	6.48	5.13	6.22
Growth Score	C	-	-	A	D	B
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	16.63%	14.94%	10.42%	23.03%	13.26%	11.28%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	2.94%	11.78%	-4.74%	10.01%	13.10%	17.17%
Current Cash Flow Growth	12.13%	5.26%	5.29%	-6.75%	7.25%	0.39%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	16.24%	18.37%	8.50%	25.08%	15.62%	10.02%
Current Ratio	1.02	1.07	1.35	1.57	1.01	1.11
Debt/Capital	11.36%	16.13%	42.92%	20.91%	31.45%	37.69%
Net Margin	46.39%	29.01%	10.26%	15.07%	29.01%	16.21%
Return on Equity	9.93%	18.23%	14.69%	18.23%	14.18%	16.89%
Sales/Assets	0.05	0.35	0.51	0.59	0.07	0.35
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	2.90%	8.81%	-1.42%	9.37%	8.50%	9.37%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	B	A	A
Daily Price Change	-0.97%	-0.75%	-1.15%	2.15%	-0.75%	-1.60%
1-Week Price Change	-3.78%	-2.39%	-1.90%	-2.39%	-1.85%	-3.52%
4-Week Price Change	-2.38%	-4.38%	0.06%	1.37%	-4.38%	-6.14%
12-Week Price Change	0.21%	0.21%	7.27%	-4.46%	6.87%	3.17%
52-Week Price Change	-20.24%	6.07%	0.33%	-21.98%	6.07%	20.43%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	1,467,075	653,306	1,916,343	786,205	2,955,392	653,306
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	-0.14%	0.00%	0.00%	-0.06%	-0.08%	0.32%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	-7.38%	0.69%	4.12%	-1.86%	-2.75%	4.43%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	-0.33%	-0.15%	0.00%	-0.30%	-0.33%	0.41%

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	F
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

This report contains independent commentary to be used for informational purposes only. The analysts contributing to this report do not hold any shares of this stock. The analysts contributing to this report do not serve on the board of the company that issued this stock.The EPS and revenue forecasts are the Zacks Consensus estimates, unless indicated otherwise on the reports first page. Additionally, the analysts contributing to this report certify that the views expressed herein accurately reflect the analysts personal views as to the subject securities and issuers. ZIR certifies that no part of the analysts compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to the specific recommendation or views expressed by the analyst in the report.

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ZIR uses the following rating system for the securities it covers. **Outperform-** ZIR expects that the subject company will outperform the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months. **Neutral-** ZIR expects that the company will perform in line with the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months. **Underperform-** ZIR expects the company will underperform the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months.

Additional Disclosure

This material represents an assessment of the market and economic environment at a specific point in time and is not intended to be a forecast of future events, or a guarantee of future results. Forward-looking statements are subject to certain risks and uncertainties. Any statements that refer to expectations, projections or characterizations of future events or circumstances, including any underlying assumptions, are forwardlooking statements. Actual results, performance, or achievements may differ materially from those expressed or implied.

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Periods:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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