FTI Consulting Inc.(FCN)

$112.82 (As of 01/07/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **$96.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months	**Zacks Recommendation:** (Since: 10/30/20) Prior Recommendation: Neutral	**Underperform**
Short Term: 1-3 Months	**Zacks Rank:** (1-5)	**4-Sell**
	Zacks Style Scores:	VGM:B
	Value: B | Growth: B | Momentum: D	

Summary

Escalating investments are likely to increase FTI Consulting' costs and weigh on the bottom line impacting the share price which has declined significantly in the year to date period. Global operations expose the company to risks associated with foreign exchange rate fluctuations. Seasonality makes revenue and profit prediction difficult. On the flip side, FTI Consulting's unique potential to bring together diverse issues like damage assessment, accounting, economics, statistics, finance and industry under a single platform makes it an excellent partner for global clients, thereby generating continued revenue growth from the existing international operations. The company's international operations help expand its geographic footprint and contribute to top-line growth. Regular share repurchases help boost investors' confidence.

Price, Consensus & Surprise

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	**$144.10 - $94.87**
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	**246,382**
Market Cap	**$4.0 B**
Year-To-Date Price Change	**1.0%**
Beta	**0.41**
Dividend / Dividend Yield	**$0.00 / 0.0%**
Industry	**Consulting Services**
Zacks Industry Rank	**Top 17% (43 out of 253)**
Last EPS Surprise	**12.4%**
Last Sales Surprise	**-0.2%**
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	**-2.5%**
Expected Report Date	**02/23/2021**
Earnings ESP	**0.0%**
P/E TTM	**21.7**
P/E F1	**19.0**
PEG F1	**1.1**
P/S TTM	**1.7**

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)

Sales EPS

Sales Estimates (millions of $)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	603 E	614 E	634 E	632 E	2,538 E
2020	605 A	608 A	622 A	610 E	2,445 E
2019	551 A	606 A	593 A	602 A	2,353 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	$1.50 E	$1.53 E	$1.57 E	$1.35 E	$5.94 E
2020	$1.53 A	$1.32 A	$1.54 A	$1.12 E	$5.50 E
2019	$1.63 A	$1.73 A	$1.63 A	$0.80 A	$5.80 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 01/07/2021. The reports text is as of 01/08/2021.

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

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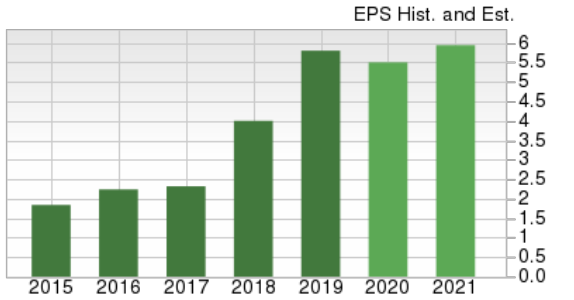
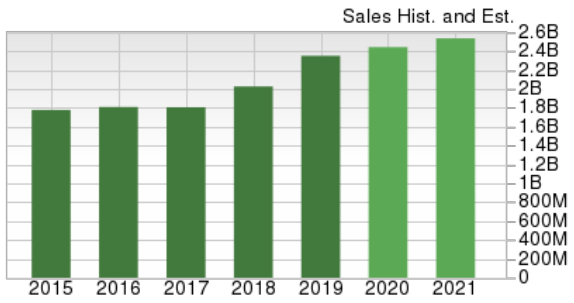
Overview

Based in Baltimore, Maryland, and founded in 1982, FTI Consulting is a global business advisory firm aimed at helping organizations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve financial, legal, operational, political and regulatory, reputational and transactional disputes. The company provides specialized consulting services across 26 foreign countries with a total headcount of more than 4,200 employees. The company has a team of highly qualified professionals, who provide problem-solving and technology services primarily to major corporations, financial institutions and law firms.The company's client list comprises a large percentage of the Fortune 500 companies, the FTSE 100 companies, as well as the majority of the largest 25 banks and the top 100 law firms in the world. The company's five main business segments include Corporate Finance and Restructuring, Forensic and Litigation Consulting, Strategic Communications, Technology, and Economic Consulting.





The Corporate Finance and Restructuring segment (31% of 2019 revenues) focuses on strategic, operational, financial and capital needs of businesses. The company offers a wide range of service offerings related to restructuring, business transformation and transaction support.

The Forensic and Litigation Consulting segment (25%) provides law firms, companies, government clients and other interested parties with end-to-end forensic and litigation services including pre-filing assessments, discovery, trial preparation, expert testimony, and other trial support services.

The Strategic Communications segment (10%) provides advice and consulting services related to financial communications, brand communications, public affairs and reputation management and business consulting.

The Technology segment (9%) provides products, services and consulting to law firms, corporations and government agencies, and also focuses on collection, preservation, review and production of electronically stored information.

The Economic Consulting segment (25%) provides law firms, companies, government entities and other interested parties with a clear analysis of complex economic issues for legal and regulatory proceedings, strategic decision making and public policy debates in U.S.

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Sell:

- FTI Consulting's total debt to total capital ratio of 0.17 was higher than the industry's 0.03. An increasing debt to capitalization ratio indicates that the proportion of debt to finance the company's assets is on the rise and so is the risk of insolvency. Further, cash and cash equivalent balance of $305 million at the end of the third-quarter 2020 was well below the long-term debt level of $308 million underscoring that the company **doesn't have enough cash to meet this debt burden** .

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- FTI Consulting's business experiences **seasonality**. Generally, professionals and clients tend to take vacations during the fourth quarter of the year, which impacts revenues across segments. Incentives are generally paid in the first quarter, thereby causing fluctuations in operating income and related cash flows. Additionally, the timing of investments or acquisitions and the expenses related to their integrations can cause fluctuations in the company's financial results. Seasonality causes considerable fluctuations in revenues and profits, making forecasting difficult.

- FTI Consulting makes majority of its investments in hiring highly qualified professionals as well as promoting and training individuals. Such investments are necessary to enhance growth and likely to benefit the company in the long term. However, **escalating investments on people are likely to increase the costs** incurred by the company and dent the bottom-line growth at the initial stage. This might have impacted the company's share price which has declined 0.6% over the past year.

- The nature of its business makes FTI Consulting vulnerable to **foreign exchange risk**. The company operates in many countries and derives a significant part of its sales and earnings from Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. Thus, appreciation or depreciation of the U.S. dollar versus foreign currencies impacts the company's results.

Risks

- Increased regulatory scrutiny and a proliferation of corporate litigation are likely to increase the **demand for FTI Consulting's products**. Additionally, structural change has become a necessity in the rapidly evolving global markets as management teams look to fend off rivals, protect intellectual property rights and transform businesses via M&A, divestiture and other restructuring activities. These developments call for FTI Consulting's specialized skill sets and are likely to boost its revenues.

- FTI Consulting's **potential to club diverse issues** like damage assessment, accounting, economics, statistics, finance and industry under a single platform look impressive. Further, FTI Consulting continues to pursue opportunities in areas such as business transformation services, transaction advisory business, restructuring, retail, construction, data and analytics, cyber business, information governance and international arbitration. This makes it an excellent partner for global clients dealing with international arbitration issues, thereby generating continued revenue growth from the existing international operations. FTI Consulting's international expansion remains strong and will likely continue in the future as well.

- We believe FTI Consulting's **international operations** help expand its geographic footprint and contribute to top-line growth. In 2019, the company earned almost 34% of its revenues from its international businesses. The industrial and geographical diversification of its customer base (throughout the United States and internationally) helps mitigate the risk of incurring material losses.

- We are impressed by FTI Consulting's endeavors to **reward shareholders though share buybacks**. In 2019, 2018 and 2017, the company had repurchased shares of worth $105.9 million, $40.7 million and $168.0 million. These initiatives not only instill investors' confidence but also positively impact earnings per share.

Last Earnings Report

FTI Consulting Q3 Earnings Tops Estimates

Quarter Ending	09/2020
Report Date	Oct 29, 2020
Sales Surprise	-0.22%
EPS Surprise	12.41%
Quarterly EPS	1.54
Annual EPS (TTM)	5.19

FTI Consulting delivered mixed third-quarter 2020 results, with earnings beating the Zacks Consensus Estimate but revenue missing the same.

Quarterly adjusted earnings per share of $1.54 (excluding 19 cents from non-recurring item) surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 12.4% but declined 5.5% on a year-over-year basis. The bottom line was negatively impacted by a 15.8% increase in billable headcount, partially offset by decline in selling, general and administrative expenses, and higher revenues.

Total revenues of $622.3 million missed consensus mark by a slight margin and increased 4.9% on a year-over-year basis. This increase was driven by higher demand in the Corporate Finance & Restructuring segment, partially offset by lower demand in the Forensic and Litigation Consulting, and Strategic Communications segments.

Revenues by Segment

Corporate Finance & Restructuring's revenues jumped 23.4% year over year to $236.6 million. The upside was driven by solid demand for restructuring services. The segment contributed 38% to total revenues.

Forensic and Litigation Consulting's revenues declined 16.5% year over year to $119.1 million. The decrease in revenues was primarily due to lower demand for disputes and investigations services. The segment contributed 19% to total revenues.

Strategic Communications' revenues declined 11.7% year over year to $53 million. This downtick was due to a $2.3-million decline in pass-through revenues and lower demand for corporate reputation and financial communications services. The segment contributed 9% to total revenues.

Technology's revenues increased 2.6% year over year to $58.6 million. The upside resulted from higher demand for global cross-border investigation and litigation services. The segment contributed 9% to total revenues.

Economic Consulting's revenues were up 9.4% year over year to $155 million. The growth was due to higher demand and realized bill rates for merger and acquisition (M&A)-related antitrust services, partially offset by lower-realized bill rates for non-M&A-related antitrust services. The segment contributed 25% to total revenues.

Operating Results

Adjusted EBITDA was $90.9 million, down 1.5% on a year-over-year basis. Adjusted EBITDA margin contracted 100 basis points year over year to 14.6%.

Balance Sheet and Cash Flow

FTI Consulting exited the quarter with cash and cash equivalents of $304.7 million compared with the prior quarter's $304.2 million. Long-term debt was $308.5 million compared with $315.8 million witnessed at the end of the previous quarter. The company generated $111.6 million of net cash from operating activities and CapEx was $11.8 million. It spent $82.9 million to repurchase 749,315 shares during this period.

Guidance

The company's guidance for 2020 was weak. Adjusted EPS is now expected in the range of $5.25-$5.75 compared with the previous guidance of $5.50-$6.00. Revenues for 2020 are expected between $2.42 billion to $2.47 billion, compared with the prior guidance of $2.45 billion to $2.55 billion

Recent News

On **Dec 04, 2020**, FTI Consulting announced that its board of directors has approved an additional amount of $200 million for share repurchase.

On **Oct. 28, 2020**, FTI Consulting announced the appointment of Vikas Papriwal as a senior managing director within the company's Corporate Finance & Restructuring segment in Dubai.

On **Oct 7, 2020**, FTI Consulting announced the appointment of Maureen Greene James as vice president of Global Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.

On **Sep 22, 2020**, FTI Consulting announced the appointment of Todd Mello as senior managing director and leader of the Valuation Services group within the company's Health Solutions practice.

On **Sep 14, 2020**, FTI Consulting announced the appointment of Colin McCafferty as a senior managing director to its wholly owned investment-banking subsidiary FTI Capital Advisors. McCafferty will join with his investment-banking team from McCafferty & Company, which he founded in 2006.

On **Sep 09, 2020**, FTI Consulting announced the appointment of Rick Arrowsmith as a senior managing director in the Corporate Finance & Restructuring segment.

Valuation

FTI Consulting shares are down 1% in the past six months and 0.6% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Business Services sector are up 20.9% and 2.2% in the past six months, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry is up 26.2% while the sector is down 4.7%.

The S&P 500 index is up 19.6% in the past six months and 17.1% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 18.92X forward 12-month price-to-earnings, which compares to 27.93X for the Zacks sub-industry, 30.37X for the Zacks sector and 22.97X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 27.06X and as low as 13.51X, with a 5-year median of 18.63X. Our Underperform recommendation indicates that the stock will perform worst than the market. Our $96.00 price target reflects 16.09X price-to-earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for FCN

Valuation Multiples - FCN

		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F 12M	Current	18.92	27.93	30.37	22.97
	5-Year High	27.06	27.93	31	23.79
	5-Year Low	13.51	18.68	18.67	15.3
	5-Year Median	18.63	21.73	21.33	17.82
P/S F 12M	Current	1.58	2.17	5.98	4.46
	5-Year High	2.08	2.17	5.98	4.46
	5-Year Low	0.69	1.34	3.06	3.21
	5-Year Median	1.24	1.55	3.61	3.67
P/B TTM	Current	2.73	6.3	6.7	6.44
	5-Year High	3.59	7.8	6.79	6.46
	5-Year Low	1.11	3.8	3.3	3.74
	5-Year Median	1.89	6.2	5.49	4.94

As of 01/07/2021 *Source: Zacks Investment Research*

Industry Analysis **Zacks Industry Rank:** Top 17% (43 out of 253)

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
CoreLogic, Inc. **(CLGX)**	Outperform	1
Charles River Associates **(CRAI)**	Outperform	3
Huron Consulting Group Inc. **(HURN)**	Outperform	1
NV5 Global, Inc. **(NVEE)**	Outperform	2
CBIZ, Inc. **(CBZ)**	Neutral	3
Exponent, Inc. **(EXPO)**	Neutral	3
Gartner, Inc. **(IT)**	Neutral	2
Stantec Inc. **(STN)**	Neutral	3

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Consulting Services

	FCN	X Industry	S&P 500	CBZ	CRAI	HURN
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Underperform	-	-	Neutral	Outperform	Outperform
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	4	-	-	3	3	1
VGM Score	B	-	-	B	B	C
Market Cap	4.02 B	1.10 B	26.57 B	1.47 B	427.93 M	1.40 B
# of Analysts	2	3	13	1	2	3
Dividend Yield	0.00%	0.00%	1.44%	0.00%	1.89%	0.00%
Value Score	B	-	-	B	A	C
Cash/Price	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.06
EV/EBITDA	11.27	13.36	14.91	12.71	8.25	14.01
PEG F1	1.13	1.48	2.65	NA	1.27	1.80
P/B	2.73	2.73	3.70	2.05	2.09	2.53
P/CF	15.68	14.99	14.31	15.74	9.29	13.23
P/E F1	18.99	20.28	20.47	16.84	16.54	25.25
P/S TTM	1.65	1.59	2.96	1.54	0.87	1.51
Earnings Yield	5.27%	4.92%	4.77%	5.94%	6.05%	3.97%
Debt/Equity	0.21	0.29	0.70	0.15	0.01	0.45
Cash Flow ($/share)	7.20	1.70	6.93	1.70	5.94	4.55
Growth Score	B	-	-	C	C	B
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	33.19%	12.16%	9.71%	9.76%	32.99%	-7.45%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	8.00%	11.94%	12.15%	16.79%	3.31%	18.76%
Current Cash Flow Growth	36.49%	9.24%	5.22%	9.56%	36.49%	9.24%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	18.21%	10.59%	8.33%	5.02%	17.67%	-1.64%
Current Ratio	1.93	1.75	1.38	1.43	1.00	1.48
Debt/Capital	17.30%	22.77%	41.97%	13.19%	0.95%	31.13%
Net Margin	7.56%	4.35%	10.40%	8.08%	4.60%	-0.37%
Return on Equity	13.27%	11.96%	15.07%	11.27%	12.68%	10.12%
Sales/Assets	0.89	0.86	0.50	0.65	0.90	0.82
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	3.82%	5.13%	5.91%	5.21%	3.59%	3.18%
Momentum Score	D	-	-	C	F	F
Daily Price Change	1.18%	2.68%	2.11%	4.57%	10.06%	5.21%
1-Week Price Change	0.60%	0.98%	1.16%	1.33%	0.79%	2.75%
4-Week Price Change	4.20%	5.57%	2.33%	5.47%	5.21%	19.07%
12-Week Price Change	-0.48%	15.79%	12.27%	11.26%	42.48%	43.41%
52-Week Price Change	-0.54%	0.64%	7.29%	-1.44%	0.64%	-12.26%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	242,386	164,409	1,691,401	229,255	27,746	145,295
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	-2.46%	0.00%	0.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	-10.07%	3.13%	2.53%	3.90%	6.06%	-9.57%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	-2.91%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	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	B
Growth Score	B
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	B

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

Disclosures

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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