

F5 Networks, Inc.(FFIV)

\$136.00 (As of 07/29/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$145.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 02/27/20)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

2-Buy

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:A

Value: A

Growth: C

Momentum: A

Summary

F5 Networks is gaining traction from strong software growth, backed by a solid uptick in public cloud and security offerings. Also, the company is benefiting from growing demand for consistent application security across multi-cloud environments, which is aiding revenue growth. Acceleration in NGINX, ELA and Virtual Edition subscription software deals is a positive. The BIG-IP Cloud Edition is also expected to be a key growth driver. The company is incorporating more automation and orchestration on its platforms to enable quicker application provisioning. Nonetheless, although the recent buyout of NGINX improves the company's position within the DevOps ecosystem and helps boost its long-term revenues, the near-term pressure on the margins and earnings is a concern. Shares of the company have underperformed the industry over the past year.

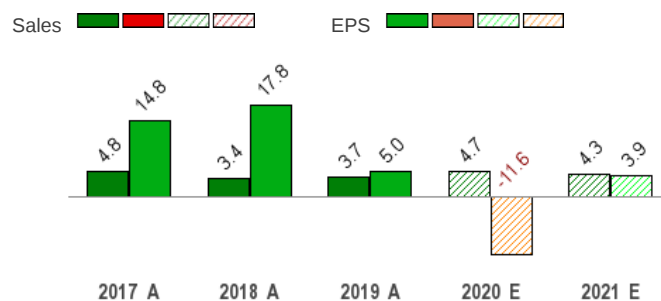
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52 Week High-Low	\$156.36 - \$79.78
20 Day Average Volume (sh)	1,020,979
Market Cap	\$8.4 B
YTD Price Change	-1.4%
Beta	1.09
Dividend / Div Yld	\$0.00 / 0.0%
Industry	Internet - Software
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 44% (111 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	6.3%
Last Sales Surprise	2.0%
EPS F1 Est- 4 week change	0.7%
Expected Report Date	10/28/2020
Earnings ESP	5.6%
P/E TTM	14.4
P/E F1	14.9
PEG F1	1.7
P/S TTM	3.6

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	597 E	612 E	621 E	645 E	2,448 E
2020	569 A	583 A	583 A	607 E	2,347 E
2019	544 A	545 A	563 A	590 A	2,242 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	\$2.18 E	\$2.30 E	\$2.40 E	\$2.55 E	\$9.52 E
2020	\$2.55 A	\$2.23 A	\$2.18 A	\$2.25 E	\$9.16 E
2019	\$2.70 A	\$2.57 A	\$2.52 A	\$2.59 A	\$10.36 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 07/29/2020. The reports text is as of 07/30/2020.

Overview

Seattle, WA-based F5 Networks Inc, founded in 1996, provides products and services to manage Internet traffic worldwide. Its application, delivery and networking products improve performance, availability and security of applications running on networks that use the Internet Protocol (IP).

The company offers BIG-IP products to manage the IP traffic between network servers, clients and other devices. The company's FirePass systems provide SSL VPN access to remote IP network users and any applications connected to those networks from any standard web browser on any device.

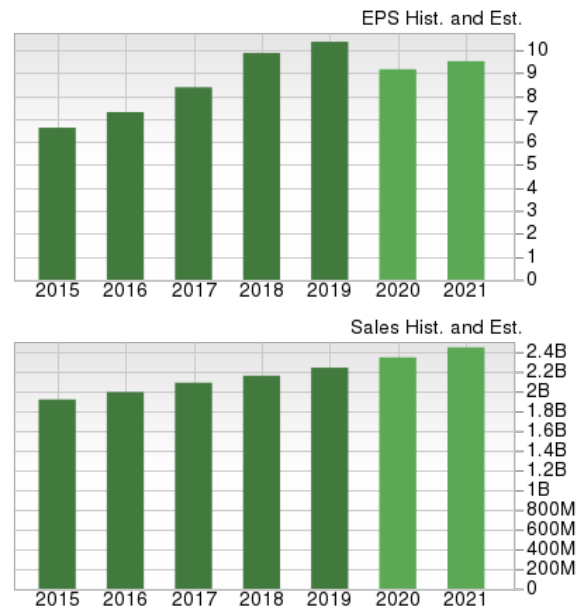
F5 Networks also offers TrafficShield, a web application firewall that provides an application-layer protection against generalized and targeted attacks. The company's WANJet devices helps to combine wide area network optimization and traffic shaping in a single device to accelerate file transfers, email, data replication and other applications over the IP networks. WebAccelerator speeds up web transactions, enhances web application performance from any location, speeds up interactive performance and improves download time.

F5 Networks serves a wide variety of enterprises and service providers among Fortune 1000 and Business Week Global 1000 companies, which includes telecommunications, financial services, technology, manufacturing and transportation enterprise customers as well as the government.

In fiscal 2019, the company reported revenues of \$2.24 billion, which increased 4% from the fiscal 2018-level. Product revenues made up 44% of fiscal 2019 total revenues (\$986 million) and Services revenues accounted for the remaining 56% of total revenues (\$1.26 billion).

The company's distributors Ingram Micro, Tech Data and Westcon accounted for 18.2%, 10.2% and 10%, respectively, of fiscal 2019 total revenues.

F5 Networks has three geographic segments. In fiscal 2019, the Americas generated 56% of revenues; EMEA, 25% and Asia-Pacific, 19%.



Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ F5 Networks is uniquely positioned to benefit from the growth prospects of the application networking market as enterprises cope with rapidly increasing capacity and security demands of next-generation applications and architectures. The company enjoys a strong market position in the Layer 4-7 content switching market. While its competitors are outlining application networking strategies, we believe that F5 Networks will likely maintain and grow its market share due to its lucrative position in the data center space while maintaining proximity with data applications. We believe that F5 Networks will get wide coverage for its products with its new release. Management is also positive regarding F5 Networks' increasing push into the security market as it expects this to help increase its addressable market and revenue growth prospects. Moreover, a new product cycle and better execution will increase revenues and can strengthen its market leadership in the future.
- ▲ F5 Networks holds a major position in the application delivery controller (ADC) market as its products are important components for data center consolidation, virtualization and cloud services. Also, Cisco's decision to shift its focus from the core ADC market has helped F5 capture considerable market share. F5 Networks is the leading developer and provider of software defined application services (SDAS) to ensure that applications delivered over the Internet Protocol (IP) networks are secure, fast and available to any user anywhere, anytime on any device.
- ▲ F5 Networks has resorted to acquisitions to boost its network security capabilities and tap the solid growth prospects in the market. The buyouts have helped the company enhance security capabilities, increasing the market share. Currently, though the security solutions available in the market have elevated the security level, the administrative expenses have also risen exponentially. This has led to a need for an integrated security solution platform that provides constant detection, prevention and remediation of security threats without elevating administrative costs. The acquisitions have enabled F5 Networks to provide its customers with secured access to data and applications, which in turn, will create a protected business environment. As the Internet security market is evolving rapidly, we believe, these deals are an important strategic move by the company.
- ▲ F5 Networks has entered into a number of partnerships or strategic alliances, striking deals with companies like Microsoft, Oracle, VMware, Cisco Systems, and HP to provide integrated application services for their Software Defined Networking (SDN) offerings. Further, the company also partnered with Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, VMware vCloud Air, Cisco ACI and many others to provide cloud-based application services and solutions. The company had also entered into a partnership with FireEye, a company which provides security platforms to protect against cyber-attacks to corporations and government agencies. These alliances have increased access to new technology, helped innovative product development, beef up F5 networks' cyber security suite, facilitated joint sales and marketing programs and improve its competitive dynamics.
- ▲ F5 Networks has a strong balance sheet with ample liquidity position and less debt obligations. Historically, the company had no long-term debts in its books. However, in January 2020, utilizes its term credit facility and therefore, as of Jun 30, 2020, the company had long-term debt of approximately \$374 million. Nonetheless, the company's cash and investments of approximately \$1.1 billion at the end of third-quarter fiscal 2020 depicts that it has ample liquidity to serve its debts. Also, its total debt to total capital ratio of 0.27 is lower than the industry average of 0.34.
- ▲ F5 Networks generates strong cash flows which provide it with ample liquidity to service its debts and fund future investments. The company generated \$485 million in operating cash flow in the first nine months of fiscal 2020.

F5 benefits from an ongoing transition toward multi-cloud environments and rising demand for application security.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ F5 Networks has a competitive edge over ARX, BIG-IP and VIPRION. However, Cisco Systems represents the greatest competitive threat to F5 Networks, given the dominance of the former in the overall networking market. Cisco has tremendous engineering and marketing resources at its disposal. Although F5's technology has been able to hold its leading position for many years, Cisco could potentially become more competitive if it invests more aggressively in the technology. In addition, Citrix Inc., Juniper Networks, Checkpoint Systems, Barracuda Networks also have a strong technology platform that could pose a more significant competitive threat on improved execution.
- ▼ F5 Networks continues to acquire a large number of companies. While this improves revenue opportunities, business mix and profitability, it also adds to integration risks. Moreover, frequent acquisitions are a distraction for management, which could impact organic growth, going forward.
- ▼ A substantial portion of the company's sales is derived from outside the U.S. During fiscal 2019, 44.5% of total revenue was garnered in currencies other than the U.S. dollar. This exposes the company to exchange rate fluctuations and counterparty default risk. Thus, an economic condition, which impacts foreign currency exchange rates, does result in transaction exposure, which leads to profit fluctuation. Moreover, execution challenges in Europe as a result of the macro economic uncertainty in the region (particularly UK and Germany), are an overhang on the company.
- ▼ Although ongoing transition toward subscription is likely to boost growth in the long run, we remain apprehensive in the near term as the transition continues to weigh on the results. Customers' adherence to a cloud-first mentality is a downtrend for hardware investment and use cases as this inclination is prolonging deal timings. Notably, declining systems revenue growth is putting pressure on the company, which is evident from the last quarterly results.

Declining systems revenues, a volatile spending atmosphere and competition from peers remain key concerns for the company.

Last Earnings Report

F5 Networks Q3 Earnings Beat, Q4 Outlook Encouraging

F5 Networks reported third-quarter fiscal 2020 non-GAAP earnings per share of \$2.18, beating the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$2.05. Moreover, the company's quarterly earnings came in significantly higher than its guidance of \$1.91-\$2.13 per share. Nonetheless, non-GAAP earnings fell 13.5% from the year-ago quarter as elevated operating expenses offset the benefit of higher revenues to a large extent.

Non-GAAP revenues increased 4% year over year to \$586 million, surpassing the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$572 million on solid software growth. Also, revenues came in ahead of the company's \$555-\$585 million guided range.

Revenue Details

Product revenues (43% of total revenues) during the quarter totaled \$253 million, up 1.8% year over year. Software sales soared 43% year over year. This upside can be attributed to the growing adoption of the Enterprise License Agreement (ELA) and annual subscriptions among customers.

Service revenues (57% of total revenues) increased 4.9% to \$330 million. Improvements to the tools and processes that the company's team uses to identify and secure renewals are among the key catalysts. Further, healthy services attached in renewal rates to software sold as perpetual or as subscriptions, including NGINX-related sales, were tailwinds. Moreover, increase in consulting-services demand associated with the rising software sales is an upside.

Margins

Gross profit inched up 1% year over year to \$477 million. However, gross margin contracted 210 basis points (bps) to 81.8%.

Operating expenses flared up 5.3% year on year to \$390 million. As a result of lower gross margin and higher operating expenses, the company's non-GAAP operating margin shrunk 320 bps to 15%.

Balance Sheet & Cash Flow

F5 Networks exited the reported quarter with cash and investments of \$1.1 billion compared with the prior-year quarter's \$1 billion.

During the first nine months of fiscal 2020, the company generated \$485 million of operating cash flow. Moreover, during the same time frame, it bought back \$50 million worth of its common stocks.

Outlook

The company issued an encouraging business outlook for the fiscal fourth quarter.

For the fiscal fourth quarter, F5 Networks expects non-GAAP revenues of \$595-\$615 million. The Zacks Consensus Estimate for revenues is pegged at \$592.9 million.

The company anticipates non-GAAP earnings per share in the \$2.30-\$2.42 band. The Zacks Consensus Estimate is pinned at \$2.21.

We believe that surging demand for multi-cloud application services will be a key growth driver. Furthermore, solid demand for software solutions is a tailwind. Rising traction from subscription and ELA offerings is another driving factor.

Additionally, F5 Networks and NGINX's first combined solution, Controller 3.0, is expected to increase the total addressable market and deal sizes by spending more use cases across DevOps and Super-NetOps customer profiles.

Quarter Ending 06/2020

Report Date	Jul 27, 2020
Sales Surprise	1.97%
EPS Surprise	6.34%
Quarterly EPS	2.18
Annual EPS (TTM)	9.55

Recent News

On Jul 7, F5 Networks introduced Silverline Shape Defense, a security solution that protects websites from the rising tide of fake internet traffic.

On Jun 29, F5 Networks announced signing an agreement with Rakuten Mobile to provide an extensive suite of application security services for the Rakuten Communications Platform (RCP), a next-generation operator enabling platform.

On Jun 9, F5 Networks announced that Lynwood Investments CY Limited has sued it in a dispute concerning the NGINX web server software business enterprise.

On May 21, F5 announced the appointment of Tom Fountain as Executive Vice President of Global Services and Chief Strategy Officer.

On May 12, F5 introduced new solutions to provide enhanced application visibility and control throughout the application lifecycle.

On Apr 7, F5 announced the appointment of Sri Shivananda to its Board of Directors.

On Feb 4, F5 announced a customer-focused approach to Application Protection, equipped with new offerings and the recent buyout of Shape Security. The portfolio will safeguard all applications without affecting end-user experience or decelerating time-to-market.

On Jan 28, F5 launched a cloud-native application delivery solution, NGINX Controller 3.0, to help organizations increase business agility, mitigate risk, and enhance their customers' digital experiences.

On Jan 25, F5 Networks completed the acquisition of Shape Security which will add protection from automated attacks, botnets, and targeted fraud to F5's portfolio of application services.

Valuation

Shares of F5 have decreased 1.4% in the year-to-date (YTD) period and 6.1% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Computer & Technology sector have gained 56.6% and 13.9%, respectively, YTD. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and the sector have gained 38.7% and 24.2%, respectively.

The S&P 500 Index has gained 0.1% year to date and 8.4% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 3.47X forward 12-month sales, which compares to 8.75X for the Zacks sub-industry, 3.89X for the Zacks sector and 3.54X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 5.44X and as low as 2.24X, with a 5-year median of 3.83X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our \$145 price target reflects 3.64X trailing 12-month sales.

The table below shows summary valuation data for FFIV

Valuation Multiples - FFIV					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/S F12M	Current	3.47	8.75	3.89	3.54
	5-Year High	5.44	8.75	3.89	3.54
	5-Year Low	2.24	3.01	2.32	2.53
	5-Year Median	3.83	5.23	3.14	3.02
P/B TTM	Current	4.19	10.50	5.92	4.40
	5-Year High	9.58	10.67	6.11	4.56
	5-Year Low	2.85	2.28	3.16	2.83
	5-Year Median	6.51	5.25	4.40	3.71
EV/Sales TTM	Current	3.44	10.36	4.62	3.19
	5-Year High	5.17	11.01	4.62	3.45
	5-Year Low	2.07	3.03	2.59	2.14
	5-Year Median	3.59	5.97	3.65	2.84

As of 07/29/2020

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Top 44% (111 out of 253)



Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Nice Ltd. (NICE)	Neutral	3
Anaplan, Inc. (PLAN)	Neutral	3
Snap Inc. (SNAP)	Neutral	3
Sogou Inc. Sponsored ADR (SOGO)	Neutral	3
Splunk Inc. (SPLK)	Neutral	3
Twitter, Inc. (TWTR)	Neutral	3
Workday, Inc. (WDAY)	Neutral	3
j2 Global, Inc. (JCOM)	Underperform	4

Industry Comparison Industry: Internet - Software				Industry Peers		
	FFIV	X Industry	S&P 500	SNCR	SPLK	WDAY
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	2	-	-	3	3	3
VGM Score	A	-	-	C	F	B
Market Cap	8.38 B	853.55 M	22.69 B	153.67 M	33.10 B	43.22 B
# of Analysts	10	5	14	3	13	32
Dividend Yield	0.00%	0.00%	1.8%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Value Score	A	-	-	F	F	F
Cash/Price	0.09	0.09	0.07	0.20	0.06	0.06
EV/EBITDA	13.57	-0.82	13.11	-17.28	4,634.85	-689.22
PEG Ratio	1.65	4.28	3.05	NA	NA	3.70
Price/Book (P/B)	3.89	7.25	3.15	2.37	18.28	16.40
Price/Cash Flow (P/CF)	14.63	26.64	12.28	4.66	1,176.43	408.97
P/E (F1)	14.85	80.40	22.27	NA	NA	82.80
Price/Sales (P/S)	3.60	4.67	2.46	0.52	13.98	11.31
Earnings Yield	6.65%	0.17%	4.25%	-11.59%	-0.16%	1.21%
Debt/Equity	0.33	0.14	0.75	0.91	1.16	0.68
Cash Flow (\$/share)	9.42	-0.00	6.94	0.74	0.18	0.45
Growth Score	C	-	-	B	D	A
Hist. EPS Growth (3-5 yrs)	13.09%	16.26%	10.85%	NA	NA	NA
Proj. EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-11.55%	-4.63%	-7.70%	69.95%	-117.92%	18.15%
Curr. Cash Flow Growth	2.02%	5.94%	5.31%	-137.28%	-139.74%	10.10%
Hist. Cash Flow Growth (3-5 yrs)	9.12%	21.83%	8.55%	-21.83%	16.42%	23.82%
Current Ratio	1.32	1.46	1.31	0.95	2.27	1.25
Debt/Capital	25.04%	20.69%	44.23%	20.69%	53.71%	40.39%
Net Margin	13.95%	-17.18%	10.45%	-29.32%	-20.56%	-13.68%
Return on Equity	21.69%	-14.34%	14.99%	-26.69%	-17.40%	-14.70%
Sales/Assets	0.57	0.60	0.53	0.54	0.47	0.58
Proj. Sales Growth (F1/F0)	4.66%	5.32%	-1.97%	-1.10%	3.30%	16.04%
Momentum Score	A	-	-	A	F	A
Daily Price Chg	-0.17%	1.38%	1.52%	0.88%	1.48%	1.96%
1 Week Price Chg	1.95%	-0.06%	0.37%	-3.65%	-0.20%	-0.03%
4 Week Price Chg	0.31%	0.39%	5.44%	0.58%	2.32%	-3.95%
12 Week Price Chg	-2.86%	25.88%	15.38%	18.15%	43.51%	20.77%
52 Week Price Chg	-6.12%	1.30%	-1.61%	-57.36%	53.97%	-8.04%
20 Day Average Volume	1,020,979	546,402	1,846,377	419,647	1,420,655	1,395,917
(F1) EPS Est 1 week change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
(F1) EPS Est 4 week change	0.67%	0.00%	0.27%	0.00%	-7.21%	5.26%
(F1) EPS Est 12 week change	0.67%	0.00%	-0.85%	58.58%	-14.38%	15.52%
(Q1) EPS Est Mthly Chg	1.97%	0.00%	0.13%	0.00%	-10.13%	13.67%

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 have an excellent 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	A
Growth Score	C
Momentum Score	A
VGM Score	A

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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