

IDACORP, Inc (IDA)

\$87.13 (As of 10/08/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$92.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 06/09/19)

Prior Recommendation: Outperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

3-Hold

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:D

Value: C

Growth: C

Momentum: F

Summary

IDACORP is gaining from strong demand from the expanding customer base and normal irrigation sales. Its long-term investment plan to strengthen infrastructure and improve the core business will assist IDACORP in serving the expanding customer base efficiently. Debt management, cost control and production of more electricity from clean sources will act as tailwinds. It has ample liquidity to meet near-term obligations. However, shares of the company have underperformed the industry in the past six months. It operates Hydro-electric power generation units that require licenses and have to go through the permitting process, which involves a number of stringent conditions that may lead to significant capital expenditure. Strict regulation, and the development and usage of low-cost alternate energy are headwinds.

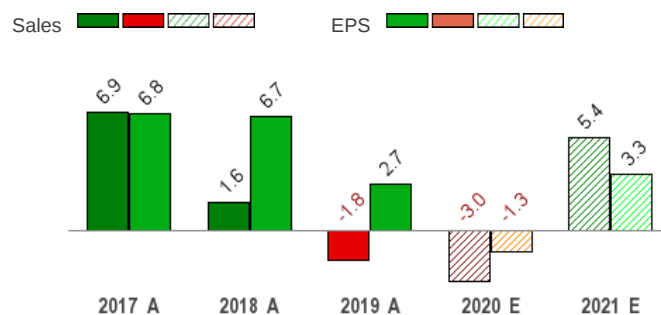
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$113.58 - \$69.05
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	355,519
Market Cap	\$4.4 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	-18.4%
Beta	0.46
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$2.68 / 3.1%
Industry	Utility - Electric Power
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 31% (174 out of 252)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	0.9%
Last Sales Surprise	NA
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.0%
Expected Report Date	10/29/2020
Earnings ESP	0.0%
P/E TTM	18.8
P/E F1	19.2
PEG F1	5.0
P/S TTM	3.4

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					1,375 E
2020	291 A	319 A			1,305 E
2019	350 A	317 A	386 A	293 A	1,346 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					\$4.70 E
2020	\$0.74 A	\$1.19 A			\$4.55 E
2019	\$0.84 A	\$1.05 A	\$1.78 A	\$0.93 A	\$4.61 A

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, except sales and EPS estimates, is as of 10/08/2020. The reports text and the analyst-provided sales and EPS estimates are as of 10/09/2020.

Overview

Headquartered in Boise, ID, IDACORP, Inc. is a regulated utility formed in 1998. The company is engaged in the transmission, distribution and sale of electricity services in southern Idaho and eastern Oregon through its primary subsidiary Idaho Power Company (Idaho Power). IDACORP served 572,000 customers as of Dec 31, 2019.

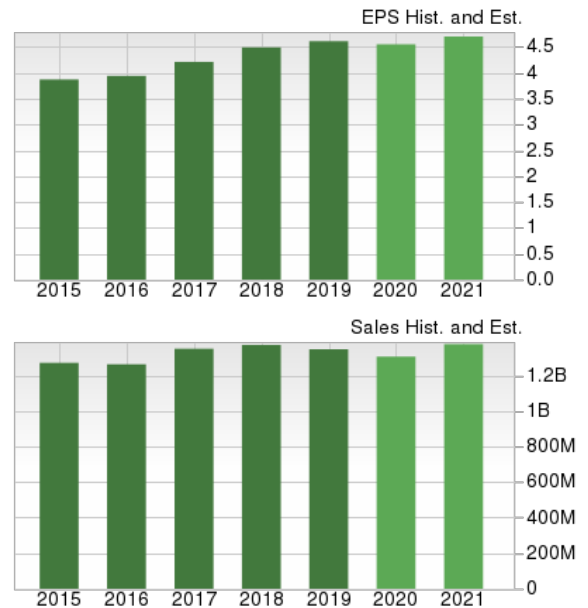
Idaho Power's asset base includes 17 hydroelectric generating plants in southern Idaho and eastern Ohio, 3 natural gas-fired generation facilities in southern Idaho, one diesel-powered generator and interests in 3 coal-fired steam electric generating plants in Wyoming, Nevada and Oregon. Out of its total 3,543 MW owned generation on Jun 30, 2020, 50.7% came from hydroelectric plants, 27.7% from coal-fired plants, 21.5% from natural gas-fired plants and the rest from the diesel facility. Idaho Power owns 4,830 miles of high-voltage transmission lines and 27,968 miles of distribution lines.

Total power supply in 2019 was 18,620 thousand MWhs, down from the 2018 level of 18,795 thousand MWhs. Along with owned generation, the company relies on long-term power purchase agreements to supply energy to end consumers. Its service area covers about 24,000 square miles. In 2019, the electric utility segment had contributed 99.7% to its total revenues, and off-system sales and the Other segment accounted for only 0.3%.

IDACORP's other subsidiaries are –

IDACORP Financial Services, Inc. (IFS): The subsidiary invests in affordable housing and other real estate investments, which generates return primarily through tax credits and accelerated tax depreciation benefits. The company is not investing any further, rather is and will continue to manage its prior investments.

Ida-West Energy Company (Ida-West): This utility operates small hydroelectric generation projects and has 50% ownership in nine hydroelectric projects with a total generating capacity of 45 megawatt (MW).



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ IDACORP's regulated electric operations in Idaho generate a relatively stable and growing earnings stream. Customer growth led to a \$18.8 million increase in operating income in 2019 from 2018, as the number of Idaho Power customers grew 2.5% over the past 12 months. This trend continued in first-half 2020 as Idaho Power's customer base improved 2.6%, which boosted operating income by \$7 million from the year-ago period. Nearly 58% of its revenues at 2019-end came from residential and irrigation customers, which in a way also safeguarded earnings amid the pandemic.

Ongoing capital investments, customer growth, cost management and focus on producing more electricity from clean sources are tailwinds.

Encouragingly, the company is rewarding its shareholders through dividend increases. In September 2019, the board of directors approved a 6.3% increase in quarterly dividend, which marks 123% increase in annual dividend since 2011. During first-half 2020, the company paid \$68.2 million as a dividend to shareholders compared with \$64.1 million in the comparable year-ago period. The current dividend payout target of the company is in the range of 60-70%.

- ▲ Total debt to capital of the company at second quarter-end was 46.5%, up sequentially from 42.6%. However, the total debt to capital is better than the industry average of 54.75% and Zacks S&P 500 composite's 50.7%. The company currently has an investment grade recommendation from the rating agencies and has ample liquidity to meet near-term obligations without any difficulties.

Its times interest earned ratio at second quarter-end was 3.7. The ratio has consistently remained more than 3 for the past few years. Times interest earned ratio of more than 1 indicates that the company is in a favorable position to meet debt obligations in the near future without any difficulties. At a time when every entity is looking forward to preserve liquidity amid uncertainty as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19, a steady times interest earned ratio is reassuring for investors.

- ▲ Significant part of the outdoor construction season is already complete. The company projects capital expenditure of \$1.6 billion for the 2020-2024 time period. Owing to its systematic investments in strengthening the generation portfolio, Idaho Power Hydroelectric Generation will be able to cater to the rising demand of its expanding customer base. The aim of the systematic investment is to provide 100% clean energy to customers by 2045.

Sustained focus on cost control has aided the company to keep its rates lower than other providers of electricity. The average industrial and residential rates charged by Idaho Power are much lower than the national average. IDACORP reiterated other operating and maintenance expenses for 2020 in the range of \$350-\$360 million, whose midpoint is lower than the expenditure incurred in 2019. Low cost of energy makes it a favorable destination for investors, resulting in new large load projects. The company will continue to gain from new customers as it provides reliable, affordable and clean energy. The expanding generation portfolio will help it cater to the increasing customer base.

- ▲ IDACORP is involved in the Boardman-to-Hemingway (B2H) project, which is a 300-mile, 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line between Boardman and Hemingway. This project, in which IDACORP holds a 21% interest, is expected to provide increased service reliability and mitigate transmission constraints once it comes online. The project is not expected to come online before 2026. Gateway West Transmission Line, another high voltage transmission line, is being jointly developed by the company and PacifiCorp, which will help in meeting customers' demand. Idaho Power's share in the total cost of the project (including both permitting and construction) is expected between \$250 million and \$450 million.

The latest Integrated Resource Plan filed by the company provides the roadmap for its exit from two of the four Jim Bridger coal-fired units in 2022 and 2026, respectively, thereby supporting the clean energy production goal by 2045. The company has been gradually lowering coal-fired generation. It lowered coal-fired generation by 59% in 2019 from 2005 levels. With more coal-fired units planned to be shut down over the next few years, electricity generation from IDACORP is set to become cleaner over the long term.

- ▲ Idaho Power continues to focus on its four strategic areas. The company has taken initiatives to enhance financial strength, improve its core business, expand brand image and focus on safety and employee engagement. These initiatives will further strengthen the operation of IDACORP's primary subsidiary.

The company's Energy Efficiency and Demand Response portfolio is comprised 27 programs, whose objective is to ensure efficient usage of energy. Efficient usage of energy can minimize or delay the need for new generation and transmission infrastructure, and thereby help in reducing customers' utility bills. In 2019, Idaho Power's energy efficiency programs reduced energy usage by 205,000 MWh compared with 173,000 in 2018.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ As the company predominantly provides electricity from hydro-electric units, development of new technology to generate electricity and lowering cost of other alternative energy sources could adversely impact demand for services provided by IDACORP. Decline in the cost of setting up utility-scale solar power plants and the addition of battery storage facilities are making solar power more popular among customers.

Advances in technology to reduce the cost of developing alternative methods of producing electric energy could result in loss of IDACORP's revenues and customers, and may require Idaho Power to make significant expenditure reductions to remain competitive. In the past six months, shares of the company have declined 9.6% against its industry's 2% rally.

- ▼ IDACORP operates in a strict regulatory environment and its nature of business is subject to complex and comprehensive federal, state and other regulations. The company generates revenues through rates fixed by the Idaho Public Utilities Commission and the Public Utility Commission of Oregon. However, these bodies have the authority to decline recovery of any cost which they deem unreasonable. In such cases, the company's ability to earn a reasonable return on investment could be adversely affected. Compliance with stringent regulatory requirements affects the operating costs of the company.

- ▼ IDACORP operates several hydroelectric generation plants which require relicensing and certain other costs. The permitting process could draw a number of onerous conditions which may lead to significant capital expenditures.

The original license of its Hells Canyon Hydroelectric Project had expired in 2005. Since then, the company is receiving annual license and working for a long-term license that is expected to come no earlier than 2022. Given the number of parties involved in the process, the relicensing is expected to be substantial.

Stringent regulatory environment, completion of projects within time and budget and regulatory compliance costs could adversely impact performance of the company.

Last Earnings Report

IDACORP Beats Q2 Earnings Estimates, Adds Customers

IDACORP, Inc. IDA reported second-quarter 2020 earnings of \$1.19 per share, which surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$1.18 by 0.8%. The bottom line also improved 13.3% year over year.

The year-over-year improvement can be attributed to strong customer growth in its service territories and normal irrigation sales, which offset decline in revenues stemming from the impact of COVID-19 on commercial and industrial customer sales.

Total Revenues

Total revenues in the second quarter were \$318.8 million, up 0.6% year over year.

Highlights of the Release

Customer growth in its service areas increased 2.6% in the 12 months ended Jun 30, 2020, which boosted operating income in the second quarter. Customer growth increased operating income by \$3.4 million in the second quarter of 2020 from the year-ago quarter's levels.

In the reported quarter, residential customers used more energy for heating and cooling due to weather variations and spending more time at home due to the stay at home directives, which increased usage per residential customer by 6% year over year.

Total operating expenses in the reported quarter declined 2.4% year over year to \$239.3 million.

Financial Update

Cash and cash equivalents of IDACORP on Jun 30 were \$460.4 million compared with \$1,736.7 million as of Dec 31, 2019.

Its long-term debt on Jun 30 was \$2,000.5 million, up from \$2,202 million at the end of 2019.

Guidance

IDACORP reaffirmed full-year 2020 earnings guidance in the range of \$4.45-\$4.65 per share, assuming normal weather in its service territories.

The company expects 2020 operating and maintenance expenses associated with Idaho Power in the range of \$350-\$360 million. Idaho Power's capital expenditure for 2020 is expected in the range of \$300-\$310 million. Long-term capital expenditure from 2020 through 2024 is expected to be \$1.6 billion.

Quarter Ending	06/2020
Report Date	Jul 30, 2020
Sales Surprise	NA
EPS Surprise	0.85%
Quarterly EPS	1.19
Annual EPS (TTM)	4.64

Valuation

IDACORP shares are down 16.7% in the year to date period, and down 19.5% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Utility sector was down 5.7% and 7.9% respectively in the year to date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry is down 3.2% and the Zacks Utility sector was down 5.8%.

The S&P 500 index is down 8.7% in the year to date period but up 20.6% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 18.67X of forward 12 months earnings, which compares to 14.39X for the Zacks sub-industry, 13.12X for the Zacks sector and 22.52X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 24.97X and as low as 16.3X, with a 5-year median of 20.89X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our \$92 price target reflects 19.71X of forward 12 months earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for IDA

Valuation Multiples - IDA					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	18.67	14.39	13.12	22.52
	5-Year High	24.97	15.36	15.27	23.47
	5-Year Low	16.3	11.07	11.35	15.27
	5-Year Median	20.89	13.24	13.74	17.7
P/S F12M	Current	3.17	2.44	2.79	4.14
	5-Year High	3.96	2.46	3.3	4.3
	5-Year Low	2.51	1.55	1.76	3.18
	5-Year Median	3.3	1.94	2.12	3.67
P/B TTM	Current	1.76	2.08	4.01	5.99
	5-Year High	2.37	2.08	4.19	6.2
	5-Year Low	1.52	1.29	2.19	3.75
	5-Year Median	1.96	1.61	2.66	4.89

As of 10/8/2020

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 31% (174 out of 252)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Ameren Corporation (AEE)	Neutral	3
Avista Corporation (AVA)	Neutral	4
DTE Energy Company (DTE)	Neutral	3
Consolidated Edison Inc (ED)	Neutral	3
Edison International (EIX)	Neutral	3
Hawaiian Electric Industries, Inc. (HE)	Neutral	3
PPL Corporation (PPL)	Neutral	4
Allete, Inc. (ALE)	Underperform	5

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Utility - Electric Power				Industry Peers		
	IDA	X Industry	S&P 500	AEE	DTE	HE
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	3	3
VGM Score	D	-	-	B	B	C
Market Cap	4.40 B	8.56 B	24.20 B	20.19 B	23.48 B	3.79 B
# of Analysts	1	3	14	5	6	1
Dividend Yield	3.08%	3.27%	1.6%	2.42%	3.32%	3.81%
Value Score	C	-	-	C	C	C
Cash/Price	0.11	0.06	0.07	0.00	0.03	0.16
EV/EBITDA	11.23	10.03	13.53	12.16	12.23	8.20
PEG F1	4.97	3.78	2.90	3.41	3.21	12.22
P/B	1.76	1.64	3.54	2.41	1.97	1.65
P/CF	10.80	7.60	13.37	10.43	9.41	7.59
P/E F1	19.04	18.17	21.94	23.50	18.17	20.40
P/S TTM	3.41	1.86	2.66	3.47	1.98	1.36
Earnings Yield	5.22%	5.50%	4.31%	4.26%	5.51%	4.90%
Debt/Equity	0.80	1.05	0.70	1.22	1.46	0.90
Cash Flow (\$/share)	8.07	4.27	6.92	7.84	12.95	4.57
Growth Score	C	-	-	C	C	C
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	4.41%	5.29%	10.45%	7.41%	6.30%	3.98%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-1.30%	1.32%	-3.01%	3.82%	6.48%	-14.57%
Current Cash Flow Growth	2.71%	5.82%	5.47%	2.50%	7.70%	8.40%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	4.23%	6.02%	8.50%	6.59%	4.88%	6.81%
Current Ratio	1.85	0.86	1.35	0.81	0.83	0.12
Debt/Capital	44.43%	51.14%	42.90%	54.86%	59.32%	47.87%
Net Margin	18.22%	9.90%	10.28%	14.57%	10.13%	7.67%
Return on Equity	9.48%	9.48%	14.79%	10.27%	10.50%	9.07%
Sales/Assets	0.19	0.22	0.51	0.20	0.28	0.20
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	0.00%	0.00%	-0.62%	0.16%	-2.62%	0.00%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	A	B	D
Daily Price Change	0.79%	1.23%	1.28%	1.29%	6.43%	0.26%
1-Week Price Change	3.00%	2.82%	2.13%	2.05%	-0.49%	2.20%
4-Week Price Change	3.80%	4.89%	4.49%	6.89%	3.35%	4.14%
12-Week Price Change	-2.93%	2.86%	6.74%	6.43%	11.09%	-6.27%
52-Week Price Change	-21.57%	-6.46%	6.65%	6.35%	-6.46%	-22.78%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	355,519	352,322	2,121,744	1,119,755	1,253,250	430,441
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.40%	0.37%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.40%	0.37%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	0.00%	0.42%	3.47%	1.18%	2.73%	1.19%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	NA%	0.00%	0.00%	0.91%	-1.84%	NA

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	C
Growth Score	C
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	D

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

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Periods:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P/TB Ratio: The price-to-tangible-book value ratio is calculated as 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.