

Jack in the Box Inc.(JACK)

\$100.39 (As of 01/26/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$115.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation: Outperform

(Since: 12/23/20)

Prior Recommendation: Neutral

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

2-Buy

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:B

Value: B

Growth: B

Momentum: D

Summary

Shares of Jack in the Box have outperformed the industry in the past six-month period. The outperformance was primarily driven by solid performance of Tiny Taco. It not only regained trust of its customers but also witnessed repetitive guest ordering. Moreover, the company is shifting focus to travel-indulgent food that offers great overall value. Thus, increased focus on food packaging and portability is likely to boost customer experience in the upcoming periods. The company is also expanding its mobile application in few markets. Moreover, initiatives like regular menu innovation, and increased focus on delivery channels and marketing are likely to benefit the company. Earnings estimates for 2021 have moved up over the past 30 days, depicting analysts optimism regarding the stock growth potential.

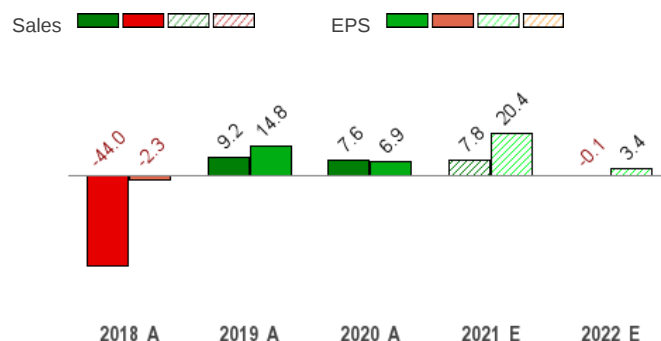
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$104.39 - \$16.81
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	277,452
Market Cap	\$2.3 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	8.9%
Beta	1.67
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$1.60 / 1.6%
Industry	Retail - Restaurants
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 6% (238 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	41.2%
Last Sales Surprise	2.5%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.2%
Expected Report Date	02/17/2021
Earnings ESP	-2.3%
P/E TTM	21.7
P/E F1	17.9
PEG F1	1.4
P/S TTM	2.3

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	334 E	246 E	251 E	254 E	1,101 E
2021	333 E	242 E	249 E	271 E	1,102 E
2020	308 A	216 A	242 A	255 A	1,022 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	\$1.79 E	\$1.22 E	\$1.40 E	\$1.45 E	\$5.79 E
2021	\$1.71 E	\$1.08 E	\$1.27 E	\$1.55 E	\$5.60 E
2020	\$1.17 A	\$0.50 A	\$1.37 A	\$1.61 A	\$4.65 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 01/26/2021. The reports text is as of 01/27/2021.

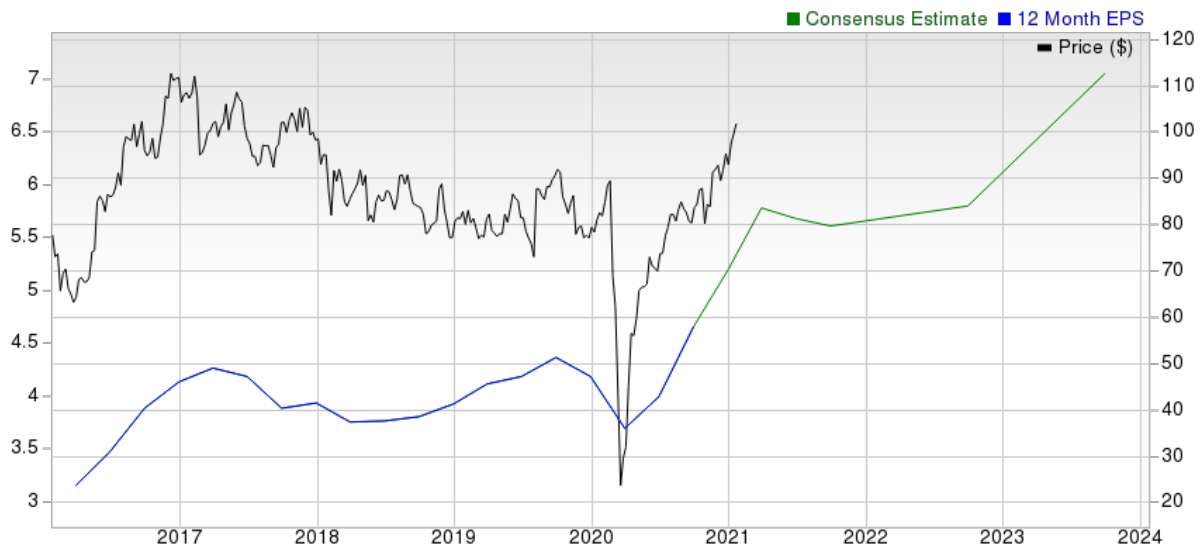
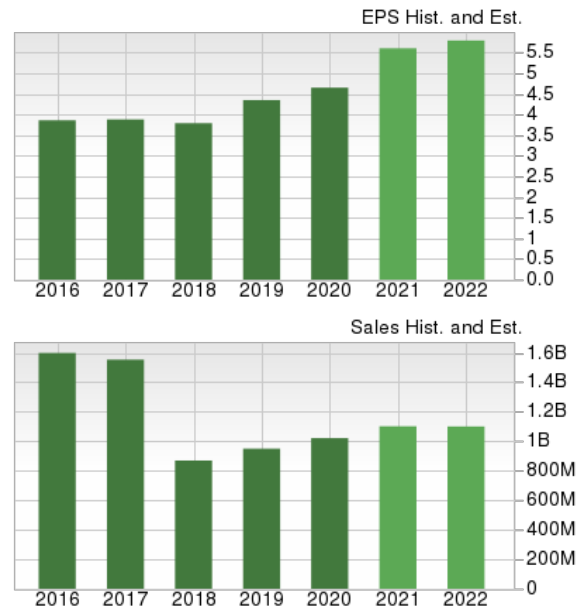
Overview

Based in San Diego, Jack in the Box Inc. is a restaurant company that operates and franchises through Jack in the Box quick-service restaurants, and is one of the nation's largest hamburger chains. In 1951, the company opened its first restaurant and since then Jack in the Box has become the largest hamburger chains. On the basis of number of restaurants, the company's top 10 markets comprise nearly 70% of the total system Jack in the Box is also the second largest QSR hamburger chain in nine of those 10 markets.

During the second quarter of 2020, the company acquired eight franchise restaurants as a result of a legal action filed in October 2019 against a franchisee. It received the judgment in January 2020, thereby granting possession of the restaurants. As of Sep 27, 2020, Jack in the Box system included 2,200 restaurants across 21 states and Guam. Notably, the company had 94% franchised restaurants.

Previously, the company operated under Jack in the Box quick-service restaurants and Qdoba Mexican Eats fast-casual restaurants.

In December 2017, the company signed an agreement to sell Qdoba to Apollo Global Management, LLC. On Mar 21, 2018, the company finally announced the sell-out of Qdoba Restaurant Corporation. Jack in the Box sold Qdoba to an affiliate of certain funds, managed by the affiliates of Apollo for roughly \$305 million in cash. In connection to the sale, the terms of credit facility demand Jack in the Box to make a pre-payment of \$260 million to retire outstanding debt under its term loan.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ **Focus on Menu Innovation:** Jack in the Box is the nation's one of the largest hamburger chains. The company makes regular menu innovations and provides limited period offers (LPO) at both its flagship restaurants to drive long-term customer loyalty. With focused menu inventions around premium products like Buttery Jack Burgers, sauced & Loaded Fries, munchie mash-ups and teriyaki bowls running currently, the company is witnessing comps growth.

Various Initiatives like regular menu innovation along with increased focus on catering, delivery and marketing are expected boost sales, going forward.

Notably, sales in the fourth quarter were primarily driven by solid performance of Tiny Taco, homestyle chicken sandwich and Classic Buttery Jack. It not only regained trust of its customers but also witnessed repetitive guest ordering. Ever since the launch of Tiny Tacos in mid-January, it has contributed to the company's performances. Also, the company's newly-launched popcorn chicken witnessed positive response in the markets. The company is shifting focus to travel-indulgent food that offers great overall value. Thus, increased focus on food packaging and portability is likely to enhance customer experience in the upcoming periods.

- ▲ **Solid Comps to Drive Growth:** Comps at Jack in the Box's stores increased 9.6% in the fiscal fourth quarter compared with 4.1 and 2.8% growth in the fiscal third and second quarter of 2020, respectively. This upside can be attributed to average check growth of 21.9%. However, transactions declined 12.3% in the quarter.

Same-store sales at franchised stores grew 12.4% compared with increase of 3% in the prior-year quarter. Meanwhile, system-wide same-store sales increased 12.2% compared with growth of 3% in the year-ago quarter.

- ▲ **Strengthening Delivery Channel:** Jack in the Box is also increasingly focusing on delivery channels, which is a growing area for the industry. Given the high demand for this service, the company has undertaken third-party delivery channels to bolster transactions and sales. The company partnered with DoorDash, Postmates, Grubhub and Uber Eats. It is expanding its mobile application in a few markets that support order-ahead functionality and payment. Notably, delivery sales have more than doubled in the quarter on the back of high mobile application usage.

Meanwhile, Jack in the Box plans to invest in drive-thrus as those derive more than 70% of total sales. Further, the implementation of digital menu board and menu board canopies is part of the company's developmental plans. In fiscal 2018, it remodeled 50 restaurants. It expects to remodel nearly double of that in fiscal 2019. Moreover, to serve the communities through delivery, drive-thru and mobile app, the company launched #StayInTheBox campaign to promote "shelter-in-place" mandates. It also developed ads to communicate its dedication for safety protocols while delivering services.

- ▲ **Focus on Franchising:** Jack in the Box restaurants are largely franchised. During the quarter under review, the company had 94% franchised restaurant flat year over year. We believe franchising a large chunk of its system will lower its general and administrative expenses and thereby boost earnings. Moreover, in the long-term, it would generate a higher return on equity by lowering capital requirements. This would also boost free cash flow, thereby enhancing shareholder return. The company also aims to continue focusing on effectively managing costs, along with improving guest experience, by striving toward operational excellence. Notably, the company believes that the majority of Jack in the Box's new unit growth will be through franchise restaurants.

- ▲ **Margin Improves in Q4:** Restaurant-level adjusted margin, an important financial metric that gives an indication about the company's health, expanded 280 basis points (bps) in the fiscal fourth quarter from the year-ago quarter's 27%. The increase was backed by improvements in labor costs, and food and packaging costs. Notably, labor costs improved by 120 bps, on the back of sales leverage, partially offset by approximately 6 percent wage inflation. While, food and packaging costs (as a percentage of company restaurant sales) decreased 100 bps owing to menu price increases and positive mix shift. However, this was partially offset by higher ingredient costs.

Risks

- **Coronavirus Likely to Hurt Results:** The Retail - Restaurants industry is currently grappling with the coronavirus pandemic and Jack in the Box isn't immune to the trend. Owing to the unprecedented nature of the crisis, the company has not provided fiscal 2021 guidance. The company announced that it will evaluate the situation on a quarterly basis and provide guidance when visibility into continued trends become clearer.
 - **High Debt a Concern:** As of Sep 27, 2020, the company's long-term debt stood at approximately \$1.4 billion, almost flat sequentially. Notably, the company's debt-to-capitalization of 235.8% compared with 249.5% as of Jul 5, 2020. Moreover, the company ended fourth-quarter fiscal 2020 with cash and cash equivalent of \$23.7 million, compared with \$197 million as of Jul 5, 2020, which may not be enough to manage the high debt level.
 - **Affordable Care Act and Increased Marketing Initiatives to Hurt Profits:** The Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare, is expected to have an adverse impact on the operators' margins. The act requires employers to provide health insurance for all qualifying employees or pay penalties for not providing coverage. Apart from additional healthcare costs, the company has been under pressure from nationwide wage increases, which would negatively impact operational results. Meanwhile, costs related to marketing initiatives, unit expansion and opening catering call centers are also expected to keep profits under pressure.
 - **Limited International Presence and Heightened Competition:** American dining brands are keen on expanding in the fast-growing emerging markets. While several other restaurateurs including Yum! Brands, McDonald's and Domino's Pizza have opened their outlets in the emerging markets; Jack in the Box seems to be slow on this front. Thus, limited international presence might be a big disadvantage for the company and hurt its competitive position. Moreover, the company is experiencing increased competitive pressure on breakfast and lunch day parts as many other restaurateurs have introduced aggressive value offers.
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Last Earnings Report

Jack in the Box Beats Q4 Earnings Estimates

Jack in the Box reported solid fourth-quarter fiscal 2020 results, wherein earnings and revenues not only surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate but also increased on a year-over-year basis.

Adjusted earnings from continuing operations came in at \$1.61 per share, beating the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$1.14 by 41.2%. The metric also increased 69.5% from 95 cents reported in the prior-year quarter.

Quarter Ending	09/2020
Report Date	Nov 18, 2020
Sales Surprise	2.51%
EPS Surprise	41.23%
Quarterly EPS	1.61
Annual EPS (TTM)	4.65

Revenue Details

During the fiscal fourth quarter, total revenues of \$255.4 million surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$249 million by 2.6%. Moreover, the top line grew 15.4% on a year-over-year basis.

Franchise rental revenues increased 23.1% year over year to \$78.7 million. The increase was primarily backed by the adoption of ASC 842 as well as higher percentage rent revenues due to a rise in franchise restaurant sales.

Franchise royalties and other revenues increased 15.1% year over year to \$44.9 million owing to a rise in franchise same-store sales.

Franchise contributions to advertising and other services revenues increased 14.2% year over year to \$45.1 million, primarily due to a rise in technology and sourcing fees, partially offset by a drop in marketing contributions.

Comps Discussion

Comps at Jack in the Box's stores increased 9.6% in the fiscal fourth quarter compared with 3.5% growth in the prior-year quarter. This upside can be attributed to average check growth of 21.9%. However, transactions declined 12.3% in the quarter.

Same-store sales at franchised stores grew 12.4% compared with 3% growth in the prior-year quarter. Meanwhile, system-wide same-store sales increased 12.2% compared with 3% growth in the year-ago quarter.

Operating Highlights

Restaurant-level adjusted margin expanded 280 basis points (bps) in the fiscal fourth quarter from the year-ago quarter to 27%. The increase was backed by improvements in labor and food and packaging costs.

Notably, labor costs improved 120 bps on the back of sales leverage, partially offset by approximately 6% wage inflation. Meanwhile, food and packaging costs (as a percentage of company restaurant sales) decreased 100 bps owing to menu price increases and positive mix shift. However, this was partially offset by higher ingredient costs. Commodity costs during the fiscal fourth quarter increased 0.4% year over year.

Franchise level margin was 41.3% in the fiscal fourth quarter compared with 40.8% in the prior-year quarter.

During the fiscal fourth quarter, selling, general and administrative expenses accounted for 5.8% of total revenues compared with 4.7% in the prior-year quarter.

Balance Sheet

As of Sep 27, 2020, cash (inclusive of restricted cash) totaled \$236.9 million compared with \$151.6 million as of Sep 29, 2019. Inventories during the quarter increased 1.8% year over year to \$1.8 million. Long-term debt totaled \$1,376.9 million as of Sep 27, 2020, compared with \$1,274.4 million at the end of Sep 29, 2019.

Owing to the temporary suspension of the share repurchase program on Apr 15, the company did not repurchase any shares during the fiscal fourth quarter.

Jack in the Box currently has \$200 million left under the share repurchase authorization, out of which \$100 million will expire in November 2021 and the remaining \$100 million will expire in November 2022.

On Nov 13, the company declared a cash dividend of 40 cents per share. The dividend will be paid out on Dec 18, 2020, to shareholders on record as of Dec 2, 2020.

Fiscal 2020 highlights

Earnings per share for the full fiscal year came in at \$4.65, compared with \$4.35 reported in the prior year.

Company restaurant sales for fiscal 2020 was reported at \$349 million, compared with 336.8 million in 2019.

Adjusted EBITDA for the 52-week ended Sep 27, 2020 came in at \$274.2 million, compared with \$269 million reported in the previous year.

Valuation

Jack in the Box's shares are up 25.6% in the past six-month period and 21.3% in the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry are up by 20.6%, while the Zacks Retail-Wholesale sector are up by 14.8% in the past six-month period. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry was up by 10.2% and sector was up by 39.7%.

The S&P 500 index is up 21% in the past six-month period and 19.9% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 17.72X forward 12-month earnings, which compares to 29.7X for the Zacks sub-industry, 31.65X for the Zacks sector and 23.19X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 25.51x and as low as 3.96x, with a 5-year median of 18.88x. Our Outperform recommendation indicates that the stock will perform better-than the market. Our \$115 price target reflects 20.31x forward 12-months earnings.

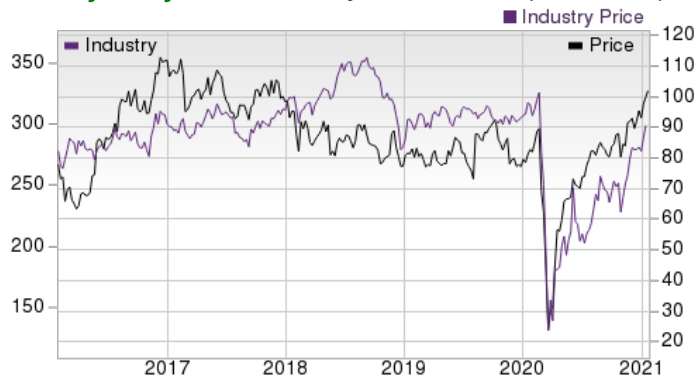
The table below shows summary valuation data for JACK.

Valuation Multiples - JACK					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	17.72	29.7	31.65	23.19
	5-Year High	25.51	34.23	34.1	23.8
	5-Year Low	3.96	20.37	19.1	15.3
	5-Year Median	18.8	23.12	23.7	17.82
P/S F12M	Current	2.07	4.04	1.38	4.58
	5-Year High	3.39	4.04	1.38	4.58
	5-Year Low	0.41	2.81	0.84	3.2
	5-Year Median	2.08	3.36	1.02	3.67
EV/EBITDA TTM	Current	11.02	22.96	19.27	17.54
	5-Year High	14.88	23.18	20.79	17.54
	5-Year Low	5.32	10.72	11.17	9.53
	5-Year Median	11.41	14.53	13.13	13.23

As of 01/26/2021

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 6% (238 out of 253)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Dominos Pizza Inc (DPZ)	Neutral	3
McDonalds Corporation (MCD)	Neutral	3
Papa John's International, Inc. (PZZA)	Neutral	3
Restaurant Brands International Inc. (QSR)	Neutral	3
Red Robin Gourmet Burgers, Inc. (RRGB)	Neutral	4
The Wendys Company (WEN)	Neutral	3
Yum Brands, Inc. (YUM)	Neutral	2
Yum China Holdings Inc. (YUMC)	Neutral	3

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Retail - Restaurants				Industry Peers		
	JACK	X Industry	S&P 500	MCD	RRGB	WEN
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Outperform	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	2	-	-	3	4	3
VGM Score	B	-	-	D	D	B
Market Cap	2.30 B	672.43 M	27.04 B	158.96 B	364.46 M	4.65 B
# of Analysts	12	7	13	16	3	14
Dividend Yield	1.58%	0.00%	1.42%	2.42%	0.00%	1.35%
Value Score	B	-	-	D	D	C
Cash/Price	0.10	0.11	0.06	0.02	0.07	0.08
EV/EBITDA	13.75	13.37	14.85	17.84	6.87	16.93
PEG F1	1.43	3.04	2.52	3.18	NA	2.34
P/B	NA	3.55	3.88	NA	2.38	8.92
P/CF	13.42	13.42	14.57	21.31	3.08	17.92
P/E F1	17.93	31.85	20.63	25.80	NA	29.49
P/S TTM	2.25	1.70	2.95	8.26	0.38	2.76
Earnings Yield	5.54%	2.74%	4.74%	3.88%	-9.98%	3.37%
Debt/Equity	-1.74	0.44	0.70	-4.15	1.35	5.22
Cash Flow (\$/share)	7.48	1.42	6.88	10.11	7.72	1.18
Growth Score	B	-	-	C	C	C
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	4.48%	-0.61%	9.69%	8.11%	-25.97%	10.07%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	20.50%	76.91%	12.61%	34.53%	77.79%	22.67%
Current Cash Flow Growth	-2.43%	-0.85%	4.97%	-0.99%	-15.30%	-0.70%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	-3.83%	3.93%	8.07%	1.88%	-0.74%	-1.18%
Current Ratio	0.99	0.96	1.38	1.07	0.67	1.69
Debt/Capital	NA%	49.00%	41.88%	NA	57.40%	83.93%
Net Margin	8.79%	-1.89%	10.44%	25.60%	-25.18%	6.26%
Return on Equity	-12.94%	-11.51%	15.37%	-53.62%	-64.97%	22.22%
Sales/Assets	0.56	0.80	0.50	0.39	0.88	0.34
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	7.87%	12.69%	6.13%	13.70%	18.21%	3.19%
Momentum Score	D	-	-	C	F	B
Daily Price Change	-0.66%	0.00%	-0.63%	0.96%	1.28%	1.54%
1-Week Price Change	2.17%	1.01%	-0.02%	1.65%	-3.98%	-3.70%
4-Week Price Change	9.29%	9.37%	3.06%	1.26%	22.55%	-5.35%
12-Week Price Change	22.16%	33.23%	13.23%	-0.65%	87.01%	-8.95%
52-Week Price Change	21.26%	3.03%	8.52%	2.37%	-28.55%	-3.30%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	277,452	205,598	1,805,457	2,567,671	396,662	2,207,048
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.13%	0.00%	0.10%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.19%	-0.10%	0.15%	0.12%	-82.12%	-0.10%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	13.75%	-2.34%	2.10%	0.44%	-56.75%	1.76%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	0.85%	0.00%	0.00%	-1.12%	-105.05%	1.83%

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	D
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.

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Periods:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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