

Ligand Pharmaceuticals (LGND)

\$180.03 (As of 02/01/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$195.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:
Neutral

(Since: 01/01/21)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

3-Hold

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM: C

Value: B

Growth: C

Momentum: F

Summary

Ligand's Captisol Formulation technology has resulted in partnerships with several leading drug companies, providing it with funds through milestone and royalty payments. The technology has been driving its revenues for the past few years. The company is looking to expand its technology platforms beyond Captisol through acquisitions. Its OmniAb platform, added with OMT acquisition, is encouraging with several partnered drugs in pivotal development stage. Ligand has acquired several other platforms in the past two years. However, the company is highly dependent on its partners for revenues. Moreover, revenues are concentrated around Kypriolis, which is facing increasing competition. Estimates movement have been stable ahead of Q4 earnings. The company has a mixed record of earnings surprises in the recent quarters.

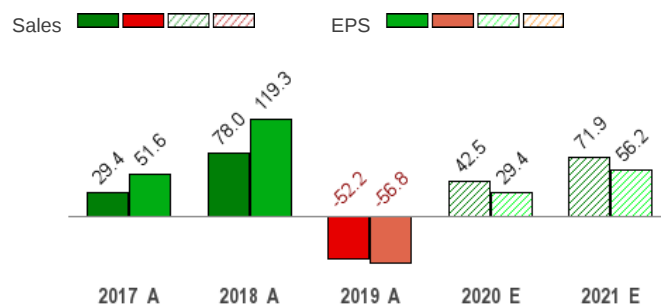
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$198.79 - \$57.24
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	852,281
Market Cap	\$3.0 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	86.4%
Beta	1.46
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$0.00 / 0.0%
Industry	Medical - Biomedical and Genetics
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 10% (227 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	-1.9%
Last Sales Surprise	-8.4%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.0%
Expected Report Date	02/03/2021
Earnings ESP	0.0%
P/E TTM	50.9
P/E F1	28.8
PEG F1	1.9
P/S TTM	20.8

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					294 E
2020	33 A	41 A	42 A	54 E	171 E
2019	43 A	25 A	25 A	27 A	120 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					\$6.25 E
2020	\$0.89 A	\$1.00 A	\$1.04 A	\$1.07 E	\$4.00 E
2019	\$1.16 A	\$0.68 A	\$0.49 A	\$0.71 A	\$3.09 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 02/01/2021. The report's text and the analyst-provided price target are as of 02/01/2021.

Overview

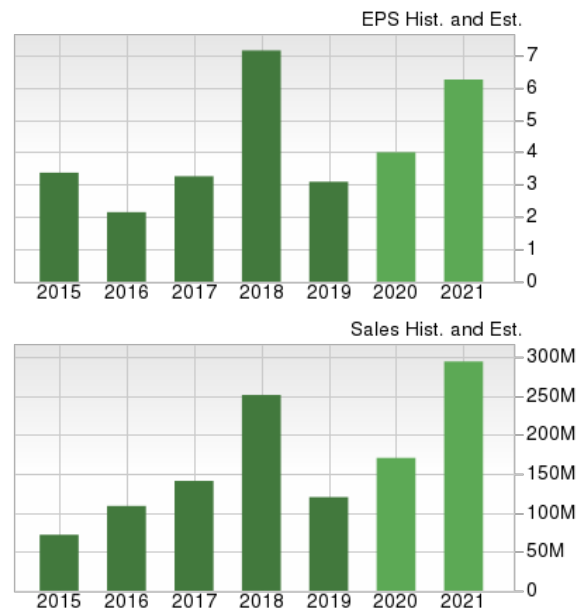
San Diego, CA-based Ligand is a biotechnology company whose business model is based on developing or acquiring royalty revenue generating assets and coupling them with a lean corporate cost structure. The company is focused on the development and licensing of biopharmaceutical assets.

Ligand's Captisol formulation technology has allowed it to enter into several licensing deals and generate royalties. Captisol is a well validated chemically modified cyclodextrin that is designed to improve safety and solubility, stability, and bioavailability or lessen the volatility, irritation, smell or taste of drugs. The Captisol drug formulation platform technology was added to Ligand's technology portfolio following its 2011 merger with CyDex.

In January 2016, Ligand acquired OMT, Inc., (Open Monoclonal Technology) for about \$178 million. The acquisition added an antibody-generating platform, OmniAb, to the company's technology portfolio. OmniAb is a patent-protected transgenic animal platform used in the discovery of fully human mono- and bispecific therapeutic antibodies.

Other technology platforms at Ligand include the LTP technology and Selexis technology. All these technologies including Captisol and OmniAb have created a strong platform for Ligand to seek new licenses and partnerships. Ligand has partnership agreements with leading healthcare companies like Novartis, Amgen, Merck, Pfizer, Celgene, Gilead and Lilly among others. The company continues to buy smaller companies to increase its technology platforms.

In 2019, Ligand recognized \$120.3 million in total revenues, down 52.2% year over year. Royalties contributed about 39.1% to total revenues in 2019.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ **Captisol Technology Supporting Revenues:** Captisol has a shelf life of five years once manufactured. Ligand derives revenues from the sale of Captisol material to its partners, who have either licensed its Captisol-enabled drugs or have licensed Captisol for their internal programs. Captisol is well protected by patents issued in the United States through 2029 and in the EU through 2025 with additional intellectual property either granted or pending an approval.

Ligand's partnership portfolio and the possibility of new products hitting the market over the next few years are encouraging.

The Captisol technology has enabled development of several FDA-approved products, which generate royalties for Ligand. Currently, the company has several approved partnered drugs developed using this technology which are generating royalties. The key drugs include Amgen's Kyprolis and Spectrum's Evomela. Several of its partners use Captisol technology to develop drugs. These partners have made significant progress with their pipeline candidates. Successful development of pipeline candidates under new and previous agreements is likely to bring in increased royalties for the company, once commercialized.

Meanwhile, higher demand for Gilead's Veklury (remdesivir), which uses Captisol technology, as a COVID-19 treatment, has boosted revenues in 2020 so far and will boost revenues in 2021.

- ▲ **OmniAb Platform Encouraging:** OmniAb platform, which Ligand added to its portfolio with the acquisition of OMT, has provided the company a new growth avenue beyond Captisol technology. The OMT technology is well protected with patents that run through 2033. In 2019, Ligand entered into nine agreements related to its OmniAb technology platform. Currently, 12 OmniAb-based partnered drugs are in pivotal stage of development. Successful development can bring significant revenues in the next few years. The company has several different platforms within the OmniAb platform — OmniRat OmniMouse and OmniChicken — which can be used for drug discovery and development. Ligand has collaborated with Johnson & Johnson for further development of the OmniChicken platform. The company believes that the platform can generate \$500 million to \$1 billion in annual royalties beginning 2030. These royalties may offset the likely decline in revenues from Captisol technology, which will lose patent exclusivity in that period. Moreover, three partnered candidates developed using this platform are under development for treating COVID-19. Successful development will likely boost revenues amid pandemic.

- ▲ **Positive on Deals:** Ligand presently has partnerships and license agreements with over 120 pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. We are positive on Ligand's deals with companies like Amgen, Merck, Glaxo and others. Ligand earned \$827 million in March 2019 from the sale of its rights to Novartis' Promacta, which was developed using its Captisol technology. Moreover, Amgen's Kyprolis achieved blockbuster status in 2019. Moreover, Ligand is expected to receive potentially \$3.5 billion from its contracts with the partners, stretched over multiple years, related to several clinical and commercial milestones.

In July 2019, Ligand acquired privately-held Ab Initio and added antigen discovery platform to its portfolio.

- ▲ **Favorable Debt Profile:** Ligand has a favorable debt profile. As of Sep 30, 2020, the company's debt to total capital was 39.5%, almost flat compared with 39.3% as of Jun 30, 2020. The ratio has decreased so far this year. A lower ratio indicates lower financial risk. Also, the company's total debt (current and long-term debt) was approximately \$455 million as of September end. The company's cash, cash equivalents, and marketable securities, totaling approximately \$795 million as of the end of September 2020, should be sufficient to pay the debt in case of insolvency.

Reasons To Sell:

▼ **Dependence on Partners:** Ligand is highly dependent on its Captisol-based partners including Amgen, Pfizer and Lilly among others. If any of the company's partners fails to receive regulatory approval or terminates a deal, Ligand's future prospects would be severely hampered. In addition, most of the agreements covered by Ligand's Captisol out-licensing business state that with the expiration of the relevant patent, the amount of royalties will be either reduced or eliminated. For instance, Pfizer has discontinued selling Avinza (pain) due to the entry of generics. As a result, Ligand expects to receive a minimal amount of royalty from Avinza, if any.

Ligand's dependence on the Captisol program and the Captisol-based partnerships are concerning.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 has resulted in a slowdown in new patient starts for some partnered drugs, which are likely to lead to lower revenues in the near term.

▼ **Reliance on Captisol Supplier:** Ligand obtains Captisol from a single supplier, Hovione – a major global supplier of active pharmaceutical ingredients and drug product intermediates, located in Portugal. Any interruption in the supply of Captisol would have an adverse effect on the company's results.

▼ **Revenues Concentrated Around Kyprolis:** Ligand derives a substantial portion of its revenues from royalties associated with the sales of Kyprolis. With the sales its rights to a major revenue generating drug, Promacta in March 2019, the company's dependence on Kyprolis' royalties increased. Any setback related to Kyprolis could have a substantial impact on the company's results. With fourth-quarter results, Amgen stated that Kyprolis is facing increased competition from several recently approved products. Moreover, several companies are looking to get its generic version approved in the United States. Although revenues from Captisol-technology hit a record high in 2018, sales from this business generally fluctuates. A bad business year will severely impact Ligand's top line. Moreover, a decrease in sales of linaclotide API to Astellas pharma in 2020 also increases the company's reliance on Kyprolis.

Last Earnings Report

Ligand Misses on Q3 Earnings & Sales

Ligand reported third-quarter 2020 adjusted earnings of \$1.04 per share, which missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$1.06. The company had reported adjusted earnings of 49 cents in the year-ago quarter.

Total revenues increased 65.8% year over year to \$41.8 million mainly due to higher Captisol revenues. However, the top line missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$46 million.

Quarter Ending 09/2020

Report Date	Oct 30, 2020
Sales Surprise	-8.36%
EPS Surprise	-1.89%
Quarterly EPS	1.04
Annual EPS (TTM)	3.64

Quarterly Highlights

Royalty revenues were \$9 million in the third quarter compared with \$9.8 million in the year-ago quarter. Ligand primarily earns royalties on sales of Amgen's Kyprolis and Acrotech Biopharma's Evomela, which were developed using its Captisol technology.

Captisol sales were \$23.4 million compared with \$6.8 million in the year-ago quarter. The significant increase was due to higher sales of Captisol to support availability of Gilead's remdesivir as a treatment for patients with severe COVID-19. The drug received FDA's Emergency Use Authorization on May 1. Remdesivir received FDA's regular approval as Veklury in October for the same indication.

Contract revenues were \$9.5 million in the third quarter compared with \$8.2 million a year ago.

Provides 2021 Guidance

Ligand maintained its guidance for sales and earnings for 2020, announced at the Analyst Day event on Oct 20. The company expects total revenues and earnings for 2020 to be approximately \$170 million and \$3.95 per share, compared with the guidance of \$165 million and \$4.10 per share, respectively, provided on the second-quarter earnings call.

The company also provided guidance for 2021. It expects total revenues to be approximately \$285 million and earnings to be \$6.00 for the year. Revenues in 2021 will be mainly be driven by Captisol sales, which are expected to be approximately \$200 million. However, the numbers fell short of the Zacks Consensus Estimate.

Recent News

Milestone Payment from Merck – Jan 13

Ligand announced that it has received a milestone payment of \$1.5 million from Merck, triggered following the FDA's acceptance of a biologics license application for Merck's 15-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine candidate, V114, for review.

Signs Agreement with Glaxo – Dec 21

Ligand announced that its subsidiary, Icagen, has assigned a collaboration and license agreement with GlaxoSmithKline. Per the deal, Glaxo will utilize the Icagen discovery technology to identify and develop inhibitors targeting neurological diseases. Ligand will be responsible for most preclinical activities and will identify candidates for entry into IND-enabling studies in collaboration with Glaxo. Glaxo will be responsible for further development and commercialization of any drug candidates, if it exercises its option for license to the candidate.

Ligand will receive \$7 million in upfront payment and will be eligible to receive up to \$154.5 million in milestone payments as well as royalties on net sales of any drug developed under the collaboration.

Valuation

Ligand's shares are up 55.6% in the past six months and 107.1% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and sector are up 5.1% and 5%, respectively, in the past six months. Over the past year, stocks in the sub-industry are up 14.4% while stocks in the sector are up 7.5%.

The S&P 500 Index is up 14% in the past six months and 16.1% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 30.19X forward 12-month earnings per share which compares to 48.65X for the Zacks sub-industry, 22.71X for the Zacks sector and 22.02X for the S&P 500 Index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 136.59X and as low as 4.53X, with a 5-year median of 38.6X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in line with the market. Our \$195.00 price target reflects 31.76X forward 12-month earnings per share.

The table below shows summary valuation data for LGND.

Valuation Multiples - LGND					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	30.19	48.65	22.71	22.02
	5-Year High	136.59	59.89	22.89	23.8
	5-Year Low	4.53	20.9	15.9	15.3
	5-Year Median	38.6	39.66	19.13	17.83
P/S TTM	Current	20.78	3.24	3.33	4.77
	5-Year High	33.41	3.82	3.68	4.96
	5-Year Low	8.88	2.34	2.35	2.81
	5-Year Median	20.64	3.25	3.21	3.87
P/B TTM	Current	4.27	2.88	4.48	6.4
	5-Year High	9.64	5.09	5.11	6.64
	5-Year Low	1.45	2	3.02	3.73
	5-Year Median	6.21	3.76	4.36	4.95

As of 01/29/2021

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 10% (227 out of 253)



Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Aclaris Therapeutics, Inc. (ACRS)	Neutral	4
Alkermes plc (ALKS)	Neutral	3
Amgen Inc. (AMGN)	Neutral	3
Bristol Myers Squibb Company (BMY)	Neutral	3
Johnson & Johnson (JNJ)	Neutral	3
Nektar Therapeutics (NKTR)	Neutral	3
OPKO Health, Inc. (OPK)	Neutral	3
Ascendis Pharma AS (ASND)	Underperform	5

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Medical - Biomedical And Genetics				Industry Peers		
	LGND	X Industry	S&P 500	ALKS	ASND	NKTR
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Underperform	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	5	3
VGM Score	C	-	-	B	F	F
Market Cap	2.98 B	368.33 M	26.06 B	3.34 B	8.02 B	3.53 B
# of Analysts	1	3	13	8	8	7
Dividend Yield	0.00%	0.00%	1.48%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Value Score	B	-	-	C	F	F
Cash/Price	0.35	0.19	0.06	0.16	0.13	0.32
EV/EBITDA	2.95	-5.63	14.72	-29.54	-29.43	-6.77
PEG F1	1.92	1.22	2.42	1.77	NA	NA
P/B	4.27	4.67	3.60	3.08	7.13	3.02
P/CF	30.98	20.44	14.66	36.10	NA	NA
P/E F1	28.80	29.66	19.64	43.39	NA	NA
P/S TTM	20.78	21.09	2.86	2.85	799.32	21.64
Earnings Yield	3.37%	-9.94%	4.98%	2.29%	-5.09%	-12.74%
Debt/Equity	0.65	0.00	0.69	0.25	0.00	0.00
Cash Flow (\$/share)	5.98	-1.20	6.85	0.58	-5.62	-2.43
Growth Score	C	-	-	A	F	D
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	15.47%	18.53%	9.69%	NA	NA	NA
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	56.25%	7.41%	12.80%	24.84%	9.94%	-2.44%
Current Cash Flow Growth	-47.25%	11.52%	4.88%	-4.72%	55.11%	-161.76%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	30.59%	6.93%	8.07%	-0.32%	NA	NA
Current Ratio	20.28	6.19	1.38	2.71	14.80	8.25
Debt/Capital	39.47%	0.00%	41.57%	20.09%	0.00%	0.00%
Net Margin	-11.23%	-215.61%	10.56%	-6.28%	-4,042.79%	-269.05%
Return on Equity	5.90%	-58.66%	15.23%	9.35%	-55.72%	-30.74%
Sales/Assets	0.11	0.18	0.51	0.64	0.01	0.09
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	72.49%	23.99%	5.92%	9.44%	442.08%	-24.02%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	D	A	C
Daily Price Change	-3.26%	-0.37%	-1.88%	-0.99%	-3.37%	6.83%
1-Week Price Change	15.63%	2.18%	-0.02%	-0.80%	1.73%	-2.47%
4-Week Price Change	86.38%	8.16%	-1.48%	5.21%	-9.97%	15.88%
12-Week Price Change	110.51%	21.00%	6.91%	22.53%	-12.91%	16.64%
52-Week Price Change	106.38%	25.00%	5.65%	20.22%	12.22%	-2.91%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	852,281	358,731	1,962,643	1,339,274	148,102	1,076,846
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	-235.71%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	-235.71%	-3.33%	0.85%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	-6.46%	0.00%	1.63%	55.81%	-5.55%	4.67%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	NA%	0.00%	0.05%	0.00%	-2.07%	-1.69%

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	C
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	C

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.