

Microsoft Corporation (MSFT)

\$254.56 (As of 04/28/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$267.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:
Neutral

(Since: 01/07/21)

Prior Recommendation: Outperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

2-Buy

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:D

Value: D

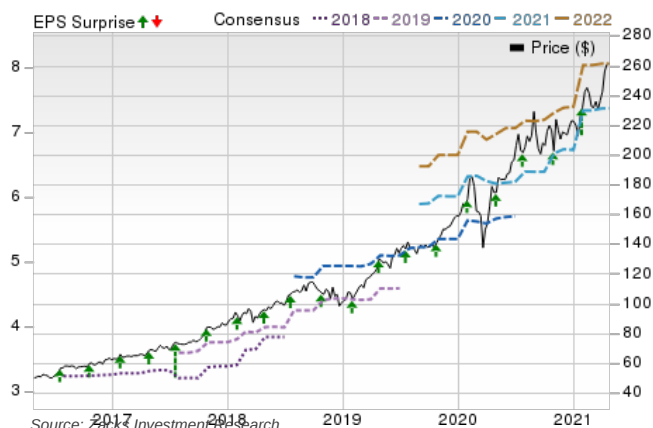
Growth: D

Momentum: A

Summary

Microsoft's Q3 performance benefitted from adoption of Azure services amid accelerated global digital transformation. Teams' user growth gained from continuation of remote work, online learning and tele healthcare trends. Solid uptake of new Xbox consoles also contributed to the top line. The company is gaining from growing user base of its different applications including Microsoft 365 suite and Dynamics. Shares have outperformed the industry in the year-to-date period. A recovering ad and job market scenario are expected to cushion LinkedIn and Search revenues. However, Microsoft expects Surface as well as Xbox Content and services revenue to decline in the fiscal fourth quarter owing to tough year over year comparisons. Increasing spend on Azure enhancements amid stiff competition in the cloud space is likely to impede margin expansion.

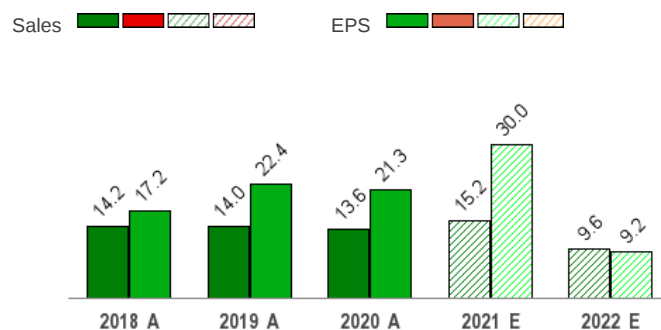
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$263.19 - \$171.88
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	24,858,212
Market Cap	\$1,917.2 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	14.5%
Beta	0.80
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$2.24 / 0.9%
Industry	Computer - Software
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 42% (106 out of 250)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	10.8%
Last Sales Surprise	1.9%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	1.6%
Expected Report Date	07/28/2021
Earnings ESP	4.5%

P/E TTM	35.1
P/E F1	34.0
PEG F1	2.7
P/S TTM	12.0

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	41,609 E	46,648 E	44,994 E	47,183 E	180,626 E
2021	37,154 A	43,076 A	41,706 A	44,223 E	164,742 E
2020	33,055 A	36,906 A	35,021 A	38,033 A	143,015 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	\$1.92 E	\$2.11 E	\$2.00 E	\$2.07 E	\$8.18 E
2021	\$1.82 A	\$2.03 A	\$1.95 A	\$1.83 E	\$7.49 E
2020	\$1.38 A	\$1.51 A	\$1.40 A	\$1.46 A	\$5.76 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 04/28/2021. The report's text and the analyst-provided price target are as of 04/29/2021.

Overview

Redmond, WA-based Microsoft Corporation is one of the largest broad-based technology providers in the world. The company dominates the PC software market with more than 80% of the market share for operating systems.

The company's Microsoft 365 application suite is one of the most popular productivity software globally. It is also now one of the two public cloud providers that can deliver a wide variety of infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) and platform-as-a-service (PaaS) solutions at scale.

Microsoft's products include operating systems, cross-device productivity applications, server applications, business solution applications, desktop and server management tools, software development tools and video games.

The company also designs and sells PCs, tablets, gaming and entertainment consoles, phones, other intelligent devices, and related accessories. Moreover, through Azure, it offers cloud-based solutions that provide customers with software, services, platforms and content.

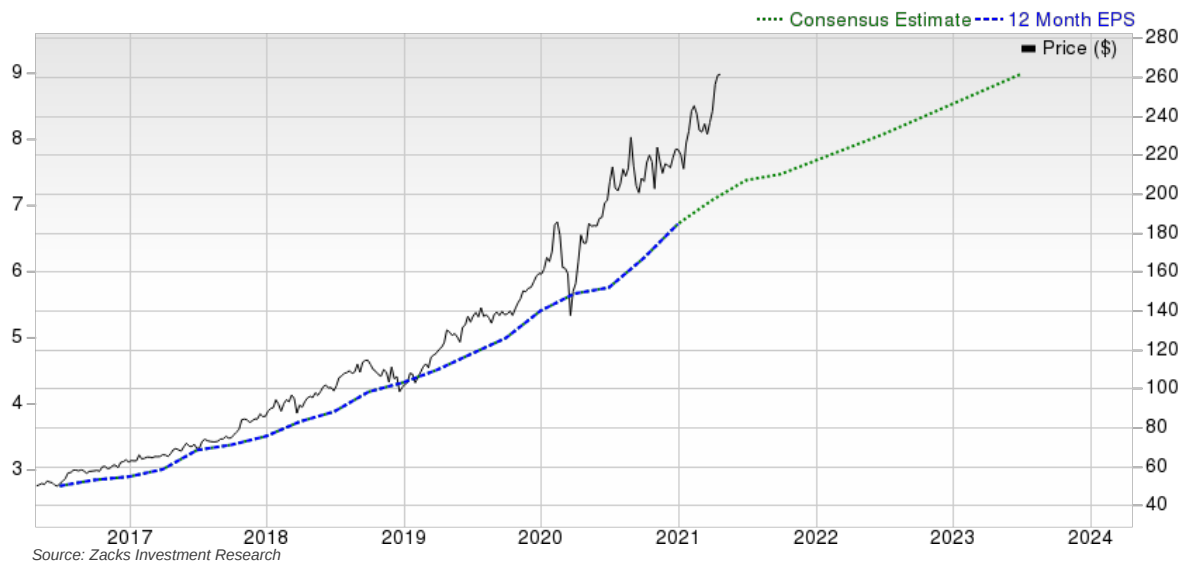
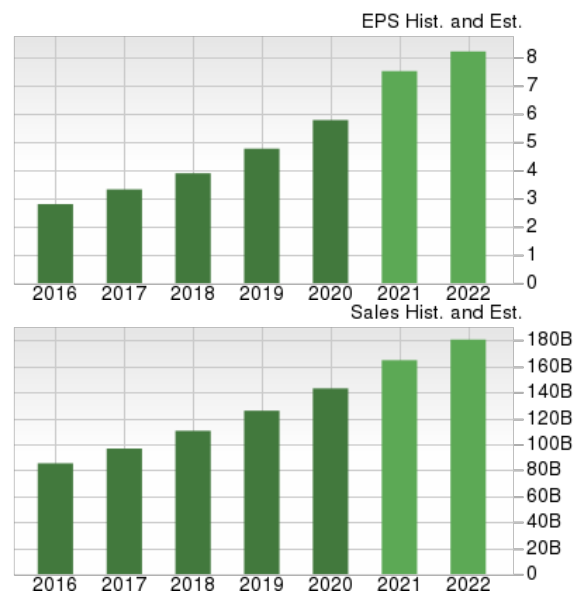
Microsoft reported revenues of \$143.02 billion in fiscal 2020. The company reports operations under three segments: Productivity & Business Processes, Intelligent Cloud and More Personal Computing.

Productivity & Business Processes accounted for 32.5% of fiscal 2020 revenues. The segment offers productivity and collaboration tools and services including Office 365, Dynamics business solutions, Teams, Relationship Sales solution, Power Platform and LinkedIn.

Intelligent Cloud, which include Azure cloud services, contributed to 33.8% of fiscal 2020 revenues.

On October 25, 2018, the company completed the acquisition of GitHub, which provides a collaboration platform and code hosting service for developers, for \$7.5 billion.

More Personal Computing represented 33.7% of fiscal 2020 revenues. The segment comprises mainly the Windows, Gaming (Xbox hardware and Xbox software and services), Devices (Surface, PC accessories, and other intelligent devices) and Search (Bing and Microsoft Advertising) businesses.



Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ Microsoft has a dominant position in the desktop PC market, with its operating systems being used in the majority of PCs worldwide. This is particularly true of the enterprise where the company generates much of its revenue and profits. But enterprise computing is undergoing changes with companies increasingly opting for the BYOD (bring-your-own-device) model. This has allowed competing platforms from Apple and Google with their strong mobile ecosystems to increase penetration at the enterprise. So, Microsoft is introducing new and improved Surface devices that could encourage enterprises to stick with Windows as they move toward BYOD and cloud computing. Microsoft's advantages in this respect are two-fold. First, the company has a very large installed base of Office users. Most legacy data are based on Office, so enterprises are usually reluctant to use other productivity solutions. Second, the BYOD model is dependent on security and cloud integration, both of which are Microsoft's strengths. As a result, Microsoft has been largely successful at retaining enterprise customers, which holds promise.
- ▲ Microsoft has doubled down on the cloud computing opportunity. In the cloud computing era, information and applications are increasingly stored, managed and protected in the cloud, from where only necessary amounts are accessed by devices of varying shapes, sizes, weights, functions and portability. As a result, software providers are increasingly offering their tools as-a-service based on subscriptions for specified periods. Further, Azure's increased availability in more than 60 announced regions globally, is expected to have strengthened Microsoft competitive position in the cloud computing market, dominated by Amazon's Amazon Web Services. Notably, Azure's revenues surged 46% at constant currency on a year-over-year basis in third-quarter fiscal 2021, driven by robust growth in consumption-based business.
- ▲ Moreover, ongoing expansion in Microsoft Teams subscriber base is aiding the company in strengthening position in the enterprise communication market against Slack and Zoom. The company has enhanced its workspace communication offering — Teams — with a slew of new capabilities enabling users to work from home seamlessly amid the coronavirus crisis. These initiatives are expected to drive subscriber base, which in turn is likely to bolster top-line performance in the quarters ahead. Markedly, Teams has been witnessing a surge in usage owing to the coronavirus-induced demand. Notably, Microsoft Teams has daily active user base of 145 million. The uptick can be attributed to continuation of coronavirus-led work-from-home, telehealth and online learning set up.
- ▲ Microsoft is one of the three largest providers of gaming hardware. Its Xbox console was one of the first gaming devices of its kind. Microsoft supplemented the hardware with a number of popular video game titles. It also introduced the Xbox Live online gaming service, which enabled subscribers to play online Xbox games with each other and download new games directly onto the device. Non-gaming applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, Netflix, Last.fm, Sky, Canal and Zune were also made available through Xbox Live. The latest acquisition of ZeniMax has provided Microsoft with access to all ZeniMax's creative studios like Bethesda Softworks, Bethesda Game Studios, ZeniMax Online Studios, and Roundhouse Studios along with all their video game franchises. This brings the number of in-house development studios to 23 from 15 for Microsoft. The deal will help boost the subscriber base for Xbox Game Pass service as Microsoft will be adding Bethesda's popular AAA titles to its Game Pass roster. Also, combining Project xCloud and Xbox Game Pass benefits for Xbox Game Pass Ultimate members, at no additional cost, is likely to be a gamechanger for Microsoft and bolster its competitive position in the cloud gaming space. Markedly, Gaming revenues increased a whopping 50% (up 48% at cc) in third-quarter of fiscal 2021, driven by increased engagement led by stay-at-home wave. Revenues from Xbox hardware grew 232%, driven by strong demand for new consoles. Moreover, Xbox content and services revenues increased 34% year over year (up 32% at cc), driven by solid growth in first-party titles. For fiscal fourth quarter, Gaming revenues are anticipated to be up mid- to high single digits year over year on solid demand of the next generation Xbox Series X and S consoles.
- ▲ Management execution has been good in recent times. This has helped Microsoft build solid cash and short-term investments balance. As of Mar 31, 2021, Microsoft had total cash, cash equivalents, and short-term investments balance of \$125.4 billion, while long-term debt (including current portion) was \$58.06 billion. Further, total debt to total capital of 30.2% is lower than the prior quarter's figure of 31.7%. The strong cash balance provides the flexibility required to pursue any growth strategy, whether by way of acquisitions or otherwise.
- ▲ We believe efforts to reward shareholders through share buybacks and dividend payments deserve a special mention. In the third quarter of fiscal 2021, the company returned \$10 billion to shareholders in the form of share repurchases and dividends. Operating cash flow during the reported quarter was \$22.2 billion compared with \$12.5 billion in the previous quarter. Free cash flow during the quarter was \$17.1 billion compared with \$8.3 billion in the prior quarter. The cash flow generation ability reflects that the company is making investments in the right direction and is expected to help it sustain current dividend payout (0.33) level at least in the near term.

The enterprise refresh cycle, new subscription model, Azure and strength in Teams and Gaming segment will continue to generate sizeable cash flows.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ Our immediate concern about Microsoft is regarding the softness in the core computing market. The company is dependent on this market for the largest chunk of its revenue. Microsoft continues to be impacted by the tablet and mobile cannibalization of computers. This is a secular negative for the company and the future growth of Windows is greatly dependent on its ability to build position in mobile devices, particularly tablets. Moreover, stiff competition from Android and Chrome at multiple price points with Apple making things difficult at the high end, remain a headwind.
- ▼ Microsoft is the dominant provider of operating systems into the PC market. So, any new player, or any technology advancement in the space, unless by Microsoft itself, results in market share erosion. While Google Chromebooks/ Android tablets and Apple Macintosh/iPad are splitting the market, Microsoft's opportunity lies in its ability to transition rapidly to a cloud and mobile focus. To date, the sales of many Microsoft products are tied to the attach rates of its Windows OS, but as more of its products are made available under an as-a-service model (like Microsoft 365) on even competing platforms, there can be new revenue streams compensating for the loss of Windows licensing fees. The transition period is not likely to be easy and execution will be key.
- ▼ Microsoft is seeing increased competition from all quarters. Particularly, Google seems to be present in all its markets. Although Google's focus has in the past been on search and online advertising, while Microsoft's has been on selling its software, the two companies are increasingly pitted against each other because of the conditions in the market. Google is seeing tremendous success, with its Android OS emerging as the leading platform for smartphones and increasingly, tablets. Its Chromebooks are also seeing a good deal of success. Moreover, Apple's Macintosh has a loyal customer base, which is an additional pressure in the high-end computing market, while its iPads are tough competition in the tablet segment. Although Microsoft's Azure has been steadily gaining market traction for quite some time now, but Amazon's cloud computing arm, Amazon Web Services, leads the cloud computing space, which is a major headwind. Also, the gaming console market is also extremely competitive since Sony and Nintendo are equally strong. Moreover, there is severe price competition in this market and successful gaming titles are a must in order to push sales.
- ▼ We note that the Microsoft currently has a trailing 12-month Price/Book (P/B) ratio of 14.74X. This level compares unfavorably to some extent with what the industry saw over the last year. Additionally, the ratio is higher than the average level of 13.26X and is near the high end of the valuation range in this period. Consequently, valuation looks slightly stretched from a P/B perspective.

Microsoft faces stiff competition in the cloud market from Amazon Web Services and its dominant position in the PC market continues to be challenged.

Last Earnings Report

Microsoft Q3 Earnings Beat, Azure & Teams Aid Top Line

Microsoft reported third-quarter fiscal 2021 non-GAAP earnings of \$1.95 per share, which beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 10.8%. The bottom line also surged 39% on a year-over-year basis (up 34% at constant currency or cc).

Revenues of \$41.706 billion increased 19% from the year-ago quarter's levels (up 16% at cc). Further, the top line surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 1.9%.

Strong demand trends across industries and improving adoption of commercial cloud offerings drove the top line performance. Solid uptick in Teams on the back of coronavirus-led work-from-home, stay-at-home, telehealth and online learning wave remained noteworthy.

Moreover, strong Commercial business on digital transformation wave positively impacted earnings and revenues. Commercial bookings climbed 39% year over year (up 38% at cc), courtesy of consistent sales execution as well as growth in Azure contracts and Microsoft 365 momentum.

Commercial remaining performance obligation amounted to \$117 billion, up 31% year over year (up 32% at cc). Commercial revenue annuity mix was 94%, up 2% year over year owing to ongoing shift to cloud infrastructure.

Commercial cloud revenues were \$17.7 billion, up 33% (up 29% at cc) year over year.

Segmental Details

Productivity & Business Processes segment, which includes the Office and Dynamics CRM businesses, contributed 32.5% to total revenues. Revenues increased 15% (up 12% at cc) on a year-over-year basis to \$13.552 billion.

Office Commercial products and cloud services revenues climbed 14% (up 10% at cc) on a year-over-year basis backed by growth in Office 365 commercial revenues, which rallied 22% (up 19% at cc). The upside can be attributed to strong installed base growth and average revenues per user (ARPU) expansion.

E5 revenue growth was driven by strength in advanced security, compliance, and voice components.

Paid Office 365 Commercial seats improved 15% year over year to 300 million, driven by growth across small- and medium-sized businesses as well as first-line worker offerings.

Office Consumer products and cloud services revenues rose 5% (up 2% at cc), driven by growth in Microsoft 365 subscription revenues. However, transactional weakness in Japan served as a headwind in the quarter under review.

Microsoft 365 Consumer subscribers totaled 50.2 million, compared with 47.5 million reported in the prior quarter. The figure was up 27% year over year, driven by coronavirus crisis-led increased demand courtesy of work-from-home wave.

Dynamics products and cloud services business improved 26% (up 22% at cc). Dynamics 365 revenues surged 45% (40% at cc).

LinkedIn revenues advanced 25% from the year-ago quarter's levels (up 23% at cc). The better-than-expected performance was driven by advertising demand growth in Marketing Solutions business.

Microsoft is gaining from expanding user base of different applications including Microsoft 365 E5 and Teams. Both solutions continue to witness record adoption. The uptick can be attributed to continuation of work-from-home, stay-at-home, telehealth and online learning wave. The company noted that Microsoft Teams has daily active user base of 145 million. Microsoft added the number of organizations with more than 1,000 users increased nearly three times on a year over year basis.

In the fiscal third quarter, Microsoft's Power Platform reported revenue growth of 84% year over year. The platform now has more than 16 million monthly active users (MAUs), suggesting 97% year-over-year growth.

Integration of Teams with Microsoft's various inhouse offerings including PowerPoint presentations, SharePoint, Stream, Dynamics 365 makes it a winner as it makes collaboration easy and engaging, while simultaneously driving outcomes and saving time.

In the quarter under review, Microsoft rolled out Microsoft Viva to help business organizations to boost employee experiences. Microsoft Viva unifies learning, communication, and insights as an integrated experience directly within Teams app and Microsoft 365 suite of applications.

The company is also witnessing significant demand for Windows 10 PCs. The company added that Windows 10 has more than 1.3 billion monthly active devices.

Intelligent Cloud segment, which includes server, and enterprise products and services, contributed 36.2% to total revenues. The segment reported revenues of \$15.118 billion, up 23% (up 20% at cc) year over year.

Server product and cloud services revenues rallied 26% year over year (up 23% at cc). The high point was **Azure's** revenues, which surged 50% year over year (up 46% at cc), driven by robust growth in consumption-based business.

On-premise server products revenues improved 3% (flat at cc) year over year, on strong annuity performance led by robust demand for hybrid

Quarter Ending	03/2021
Report Date	Apr 27, 2021
Sales Surprise	1.88%
EPS Surprise	10.80%
Quarterly EPS	1.95
Annual EPS (TTM)	7.26

and premium offerings.

Further, enterprise mobility installed base revenues rallied 30% to more than 174 million seats.

Enterprise service revenues improved 10% (up 8% at cc) in the reported quarter, owing to growth in Microsoft Consulting Services.

More Personal Computing segment, which primarily comprises Windows, Gaming, Devices and Search businesses, contributed 31.3% to total revenues. Revenues were up 19% (up 16% at cc) year over year to \$13.036 billion, driven by Windows OEM, Search and online gaming trends.

Windows commercial products and cloud services revenues increased 10% year over year (up 7% at cc), on the back of higher customer adoption of Microsoft 365 offerings and robust improvement in advanced security solutions.

Windows OEM revenues increased 10% on a year-over-year basis owing to robust PC demand.

Windows OEM non-Pro revenues advanced 44%, on strong consumer PC demand driven by remote working and online learning wave.

However, Windows OEM Pro revenue declined 2%.

Search advertising revenues, excluding traffic acquisition costs (TAC), increased 17% (up 14% at cc) on recovering advertising market.

Surface revenues climbed 12% (up 7% at cc) from the year-ago quarter's levels to \$1.504 billion.

Gaming revenues increased a whopping 50% (up 48% at cc) driven by increased engagement led by stay-at-home wave. Revenues from Xbox hardware soared 232% (up 223% at cc), driven by the new consoles.

Moreover, Xbox content and services revenues increased 34% year over year (up 32% at cc), driven by solid growth in first-party titles. Post the completion of ZeniMax acquisition, Microsoft's Game Pass service now includes 20 highly popular ZeniMax gaming titles.

Operating Results

Non-GAAP gross margin increased 19% (up 16% in cc) to \$28.66 billion. This can be attributed to revenue growth across Productivity & Business Processes, Intelligent Cloud and More Personal Computing segments. Non-GAAP gross margin (in percentage terms) of 69% was flat on a year-over-year basis, on change in accounting estimate.

Commercial cloud gross margin was 70%, up 300 basis points (bps) year over year, driven by change in accounting estimate.

Operating margin expanded 400 bps on a year-over-year basis to 41%.

Productivity & Business Process operating income grew 26% (up 20% at cc) to \$6.03 billion. Intelligent Cloud operating income surged 41% (up 36% at cc) to \$6.43 billion.

More Personal Computing operating income rallied 27% (up 22% at cc) to \$4.59 billion. Gross margin (as a percentage of segment income) contracted 200 bps on a year-over-year basis, as sales mix moved to Gaming.

Balance Sheet & Free Cash Flow

As of Mar 31, 2021, Microsoft had total cash, cash equivalents, and short-term investments balance of \$125.4 billion, compared with \$131.97 billion as of Dec 31, 2020. As of Mar 31, 2021, long-term debt (including current portion) was \$58.06 billion compared with \$60.52 billion as of Dec 31, 2020.

Operating cash flow during the reported quarter was \$22.2 billion compared with \$12.5 billion in the previous quarter. Free cash flow during the quarter was \$17.1 billion compared with \$8.3 billion in the prior quarter.

In the reported quarter, the company returned \$10 billion to shareholders in the form of share repurchases and dividends.

Guidance

For fourth-quarter fiscal 2021, Productivity and Business Processes revenues are anticipated between \$13.8 billion and \$14.05 billion.

Strong upsell opportunity for Microsoft E5 and momentum in Office 365 is expected to drive growth in Office commercial. However, on-premises business is anticipated to decline in the high-teens range due to customers' shift to cloud.

Office consumer revenues are expected to witness growth in mid- to high teens driven by increases in Microsoft 365 subscription revenues.

LinkedIn revenue growth is anticipated to be in mid-30% range driven by improving ad and jobs market. Revenue growth for Dynamics is expected to be at similar levels seen in the fiscal third quarter of 2021 driven by continued Dynamics 365 momentum.

Intelligent Cloud revenues are anticipated between \$16.2 billion and \$16.45 billion. Azure's revenue growth is likely to reflect continued strength in the consumption-based services.

Further, gains from Microsoft 365 suite adoption is expected to boost growth in per-user business. However, the company noted that it was expecting some moderation in growth given the large size of the installed base.

However, in Enterprise Services business, management expects revenues to be in line on a sequential basis. On-premises server business is projected to grow in the mid-single digits range driven by continued demand for hybrid and premium offerings.

More Personal Computing revenues are expected between \$13.6 billion and \$14 billion. The company expects overall Windows revenues to grow in the mid-single digits range. The improvement is likely to be led by continued momentum seen in Windows Commercial products and cloud services growth and robust PC demand partly offset by supply chain disruptions,

Search advertising revenues, excluding TAC, are anticipated to grow in the mid-40% range on improving advertising market.

In the fiscal fourth quarter, Surface revenues are anticipated to decline in the mid-teens range on a year-over-year basis due to tougher year over year comparison.

Gaming revenues are anticipated to be up in mid- to high single digits year over year. Xbox content and services revenue are projected to decline in the mid- to high single digits range owing to tougher year over year comparisons. Demand for Xbox Series X and S will continue to be negatively impacted by supply issues.

Management expects COGS between \$13.7 billion and \$13.9 billion, and operating expenses in the range of \$13.1-\$13.2 billion.

Recent News

On Apr 12, Microsoft announced the acquisition of Nuance Communications for \$19.7 billion (including Nuance's net debt) in an all-cash deal. Microsoft will pay \$56 per share to Nuance shareholders, which represents 23% premium to the stock's closing price of \$45.58 on Apr 9, 2021.

The acquisition has been approved by Boards of Directors of the companies and is expected to be concluded by the end of 2021. The deal is subject to Nuance's shareholders' approval as well as other regulatory and customary conditions.

On Mar 31, 2021, Microsoft secured a U.S. army contract worth \$21.88 billion, spread across 10-year period. The tech giant is committed to furnish 120,000 AR headsets for the Army based on their Integrated Visual Augmentation System (IVAS) design requirements. The modified design enhances robust augmented reality (AR) capabilities of HoloLens 2 with customized upgrades.

On Mar 16, 2021, Microsoft announced acquisition of The Marsden Group, which offers industrial technology innovation and rapid prototyping solutions, in a bid to strengthen digital transformation capabilities across its cloud, edge and AI products.

On Feb 25, 2021, Microsoft teamed up with Amadeus to provide innovative cloud-based travel solutions to boost travel experiences. The companies will utilize Azure platform along with Microsoft's other solutions like Microsoft 365, Dynamics 365, Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Power Platform to build custom solutions for the travel industry.

On Feb 11, 2021, Microsoft and Volkswagen Group's software company Car.Software Organisation announced collaboration in a bid to develop a cloud-based Automated Driving Platform (ADP) on Microsoft Azure and utilize its compute and data capabilities to provide enhanced automated driving experiences at global scale.

On Feb 4, 2021, Microsoft rolled out Microsoft Viva, an employee experience platform, aimed at enhancing employee engagement, wellbeing, learning, and knowledge discovery. Viva is integrated with the productivity and collaboration capabilities in Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams to provide better experience.

On Jan 27, 2021, Microsoft enhanced Microsoft Translator offering with the addition of Inuktitut text translation.

On Jan 22, 2021, Microsoft announced its workspace communication offering — Teams, is being leveraged by SAP across its solutions portfolio including SAP S/4HANA, SAP SuccessFactors and SAP Customer Experience.

On Dec 31, Microsoft revealed that the company's ongoing investigation related to the SolarWinds cyberattack has found out that hackers viewed some of its source code. However, no modifications were executed as the account in question was not allowed to facilitate changes to codes or engineering systems, added the company.

On Dec 14, Microsoft collaborated with Warner Bros to design an arcade-style video game for Xbox consoles inspired by the upcoming movie *Space Jam: A New Legacy*.

On Dec 10, Microsoft and Deutsche Telekom recently extended their collaboration to ramp up cloud migration for customers especially enterprise and midmarket.

On Dec 9, Microsoft announced that its cloud gaming service will be available on iOS devices and Windows PCs as a part of the Xbox Game Pass Ultimate subscription from spring 2021.

On Dec 8, Microsoft announced that it was teaming up with Johnson Controls to integrate the latter's OpenBlue Digital Twin with its Azure Digital Twins. The integration of the two platforms will enable clients to manage physical spaces digitally as well as increase efficiency.

On Nov 17, Microsoft unveiled Pluton security processor aimed at boosting the security for Windows PCs. The company is working alongside Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), Qualcomm and Intel for Pluton processor. Microsoft stated that Pluton will be built in the CPU processors from AMD, Intel and Qualcomm to offer more security against software bugs' attack and credential theft attempt for Windows PC platform.

On Nov 10, Microsoft announced the launch of Xbox Series X and Xbox Series S, in a bid to provide console gamers with immersive gaming experiences across the world.

On Oct 26, Microsoft, C3.ai and Adobe announced the roll out of C3 AI CRM, AI-first customer relationship management solution, powered by Microsoft Dynamics 365. It is integrated with Adobe Experience Cloud, and aimed at enabling enterprises to drive operations.

On Sep 22, Microsoft announced major developments to its Teams app, Azure cloud computing and Office productivity suite at its Ignite conference. Ignite conference 2020 is a three-day virtual event that commenced on Sep 22 and will culminate on Sep 24. One of the biggest highlights of the Ignite conference was the launch of Azure Communications Services platform.

On Sep 21, Microsoft announced its plan to acquire leading video game publisher Bethesda Softworks' parent company ZeniMax Media for an all-cash deal valued at \$7.5 billion. The acquisition will enable Microsoft to gain access to all ZeniMax's creative studios like Bethesda Softworks, Bethesda Game Studios, ZeniMax Online Studios, and Roundhouse Studios along with all their video game franchises. This brings the number of in-house development studios to 23 from 15 for Microsoft.

Valuation

Microsoft shares are up 14.4% in the year-to-date period and 42.1% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the

Zacks Computer & Technology sector are up 13.6% and 14.5% in the year-to-date period, respectively. In the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and sector are up 45.8% and 63.9%, respectively.

The S&P 500 index is up 12.3% in the year-to-date period, and 46.5% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 32.04X forward 12-month earnings compared with 34.06X for the Zacks sub-industry, 29.79X for the Zacks sector and 22.93X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 36.13X and as low as 16.82X, with a five-year median of 24.73X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in line with the market. Our \$267 price target reflects 33.61X forward 12-month earnings.

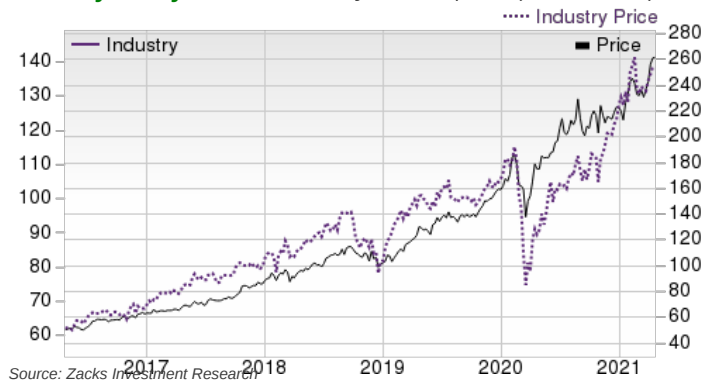
The table below shows summary valuation data for MSFT

Valuation Multiples - MSFT					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	32.04	34.06	29.79	22.93
	5-Year High	36.13	35.41	29.79	23.83
	5-Year Low	16.82	19.83	16.95	15.3
	5-Year Median	24.73	26.05	20.08	18.01
P/S F12M	Current	10.8	8.86	5.06	4.82
	5-Year High	11.12	8.86	5.06	4.82
	5-Year Low	4.04	4.26	2.8	3.21
	5-Year Median	6.55	6.16	3.5	3.71
EV/Sales TTM	Current	11.53	9.58	5.85	4.99
	5-Year High	11.88	9.58	5.85	4.99
	5-Year Low	3.59	3.81	3.08	2.63
	5-Year Median	6.74	6.25	3.97	3.61

As of 04/28/2021

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Top 42% (106 out of 250)



Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Apple Inc. (AAPL)	Neutral	2
Amazon.com, Inc. (AMZN)	Neutral	3
salesforce.com, inc. (CRM)	Neutral	4
Alphabet Inc. (GOOGL)	Neutral	3
International Business Machines Corporation (IBM)	Neutral	3
Oracle Corporation (ORCL)	Neutral	2
VMware, Inc. (VMW)	Neutral	4
Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (ZM)	Neutral	3

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Computer - Software				Industry Peers		
	MSFT	X Industry	S&P 500	AAPL	AMZN	ORCL
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	2	-	-	2	3	2
VGM Score	D	-	-	B	A	D
Market Cap	1,917.24 B	2.99 B	29.97 B	2,242.55 B	1,743.49 B	215.60 B
# of Analysts	13	4	12	12	17	12
Dividend Yield	0.88%	0.00%	1.27%	0.61%	0.00%	1.71%
Value Score	D	-	-	D	D	C
Cash/Price	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.17
EV/EBITDA	26.82	26.82	17.06	28.98	33.11	14.29
PEG F1	2.74	2.69	2.34	2.37	2.64	1.97
P/B	14.25	7.92	4.16	33.86	18.65	22.37
P/CF	33.75	34.44	17.29	33.17	37.39	15.99
P/E F1	33.99	41.20	22.15	29.59	70.89	16.78
P/S TTM	11.99	5.65	3.43	6.89	4.52	5.43
Earnings Yield	2.94%	2.33%	4.45%	3.38%	1.41%	5.96%
Debt/Equity	0.37	0.23	0.66	1.50	0.34	6.59
Cash Flow (\$/share)	7.54	1.37	6.78	4.03	92.50	4.68
Growth Score	D	-	-	A	A	D
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	21.45%	12.16%	9.70%	12.55%	78.50%	11.42%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	30.06%	14.51%	17.22%	37.65%	16.64%	15.76%
Current Cash Flow Growth	17.66%	6.99%	0.72%	0.98%	39.56%	-2.42%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	10.19%	9.85%	7.37%	1.15%	46.61%	-0.39%
Current Ratio	2.29	1.69	1.38	1.16	1.05	2.16
Debt/Capital	27.10%	19.60%	41.51%	59.99%	25.41%	86.83%
Net Margin	35.02%	7.28%	11.17%	23.45%	5.53%	32.32%
Return on Equity	43.75%	13.33%	15.28%	112.31%	27.07%	116.15%
Sales/Assets	0.53	0.53	0.50	0.98	1.43	0.35
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	15.19%	6.43%	8.02%	23.03%	22.55%	3.20%
Momentum Score	A	-	-	A	A	C
Daily Price Change	-2.83%	0.00%	-0.09%	-0.60%	1.20%	-0.60%
1-Week Price Change	0.16%	0.00%	0.47%	0.12%	-1.72%	-5.04%
4-Week Price Change	7.97%	5.06%	4.74%	9.36%	11.78%	6.56%
12-Week Price Change	4.76%	4.82%	13.91%	-0.27%	4.41%	20.27%
52-Week Price Change	43.47%	49.46%	46.53%	85.70%	45.76%	38.77%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	24,858,212	138,737	1,734,096	81,450,816	3,107,593	12,949,153
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	1.58%	0.00%	0.00%	0.28%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	1.58%	0.00%	0.26%	0.59%	0.33%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	2.03%	2.03%	2.04%	1.20%	8.44%	2.57%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	3.74%	0.00%	0.25%	0.95%	-0.05%	0.00%

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Zacks Stock Rating System

We offer two rating systems that take into account investors' holding horizons: Zacks Rank and Zacks Recommendation. Each provides valuable insights into the future profitability of the stock and can be used separately or in combination with each other depending on your investment style.

Zacks Recommendation

The Zacks Recommendation aims to predict performance over the next 6 to 12 months. The foundation for the quantitatively determined Zacks Recommendation is trends in the company's estimate revisions and earnings outlook. The Zacks Recommendation is broken down into 3 Levels; Outperform, Neutral and Underperform. Unlike many Wall Street firms, we maintain a balance between the number of Outperform and Neutral recommendations. Our team of 70 analysts are fully versed in the benefits of earnings estimate revisions and how that is harnessed through the Zacks quantitative rating system. But we have given our analysts the ability to override the Zacks Recommendation for the 1200 stocks that they follow. The reason for the analyst over-rides is that there are often factors such as valuation, industry conditions and management effectiveness that a trained investment professional can spot better than a quantitative model.

Zacks Rank

The Zacks Rank is our short-term rating system that is most effective over the one- to three-month holding horizon. The underlying driver for the quantitatively-determined Zacks Rank is the same as the Zacks Recommendation, and reflects trends in earnings estimate revisions.

Zacks Style Scores

The Zacks Style Score is as a complementary indicator to the Zacks rating system, giving investors a way to focus on the highest rated stocks that best fit their own stock picking preferences.

Academic research has proven that stocks with the best Value, Growth and Momentum characteristics outperform the market. The Zacks Style Scores rate stocks on each of these individual styles and assigns a rating of A, B, C, D and F. We also produce the VGM Score (V for Value, G for Growth and M for Momentum), which combines the weighted average of the individual Style Scores into one score. This is perfectly suited for those who want their stocks to have the best scores across the board.

Value Score	D
Growth Score	D
Momentum Score	A
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.

Disclosures

This report contains independent commentary to be used for informational purposes only. The analysts contributing to this report do not hold any shares of this stock. The analysts contributing to this report do not serve on the board of the company that issued this stock. The EPS and revenue forecasts are the Zacks Consensus estimates, unless indicated otherwise on the reports first page. Additionally, the analysts contributing to this report certify that the views expressed herein accurately reflect the analysts personal views as to the subject securities and issuers. ZIR certifies that no part of the analysts compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to the specific recommendation or views expressed by the analyst in the report.

Additional information on the securities mentioned in this report is available upon request. This report is based on data obtained from sources we believe to be reliable, but is not guaranteed as to accuracy and does not purport to be complete. Any opinions expressed herein are subject to change.

ZIR is not an investment advisor and the report should not be construed as advice designed to meet the particular investment needs of any investor. Prior to making any investment decision, you are advised to consult with your broker, investment advisor, or other appropriate tax or financial professional to determine the suitability of any investment. This report and others like it are published regularly and not in response to episodic market activity or events affecting the securities industry.

This report is not to be construed as an offer or the solicitation of an offer to buy or sell the securities herein mentioned. ZIR or its officers, employees or customers may have a position long or short in the securities mentioned and buy or sell the securities from time to time. ZIR is not a broker-dealer. ZIR may enter into arms-length agreements with broker-dealers to provide this research to their clients. Zacks and its staff are not involved in investment banking activities for the stock issuer covered in this report.

ZIR uses the following rating system for the securities it covers. **Outperform-** ZIR expects that the subject company will outperform the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months. **Neutral-** ZIR expects that the company will perform in line with the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months. **Underperform-** ZIR expects the company will underperform the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months.

No part of this report can be reprinted, republished or transmitted electronically without the prior written authorization of ZIR.

Additional Disclosure

This material represents an assessment of the market and economic environment at a specific point in time and is not intended to be a forecast of future events, or a guarantee of future results. Forward-looking statements are subject to certain risks and uncertainties. Any statements that refer to expectations, projections or characterizations of future events or circumstances, including any underlying assumptions, are forward-looking statements. Actual results, performance, or achievements may differ materially from those expressed or implied.

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.