

Proofpoint, Inc. (PFPT)

\$131.21 (As of 02/09/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$112.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation: Underperform

(Since: 02/09/21)

Prior Recommendation: Neutral

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

5-Strong Sell

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:B

Value: D

Growth: B

Momentum: A

Summary

Proofpoint's increased investment toward enhancing sales & marketing capabilities are likely to continue hurting its profitability. Additionally, forex headwinds and acquisition-related elevated expenses are expected to dent its margins. Moreover, competition from numerous big and small players in the security application market poses a concern. In addition, increasing consolidation in the security industry is intensifying competition. Nonetheless, Proofpoint is benefiting from rising demand for security and networking products amid the coronavirus crisis. Ongoing migration to the cloud and high renewal rates are also positives. Also, the acquisition of security awareness startup Defense Works is expected to boost its portfolio. Robust demand for Email Fraud Defense, Threat Response and PSAT are positives as well.

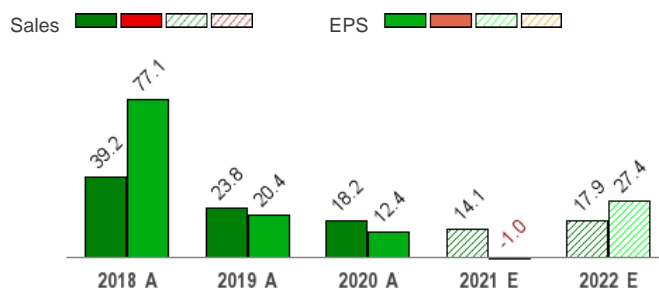
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$140.81 - \$83.81
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	493,537
Market Cap	\$7.6 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	-4.0%
Beta	1.17
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$0.00 / 0.0%
Industry	Security
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 2% (247 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	21.4%
Last Sales Surprise	2.3%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	-44.0%
Expected Report Date	05/06/2021
Earnings ESP	-0.1%

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	332 E	346 E	360 E	376 E	1,412 E
2021	282 E	294 E	305 E	318 E	1,198 E
2020	250 A	258 A	267 A	275 A	1,050 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	\$0.52 E	\$0.61 E	\$0.67 E	\$0.73 E	\$2.51 E
2021	\$0.39 E	\$0.48 E	\$0.53 E	\$0.56 E	\$1.97 E
2020	\$0.38 A	\$0.51 A	\$0.53 A	\$0.51 A	\$1.99 A

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

P/E TTM	67.8
P/E F1	66.3
PEG F1	2.5
P/S TTM	7.2

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and sales estimates, is as of 02/09/2021. The report's text and the analyst-provided price target are as of 02/10/2021.

Overview

Headquartered in Sunnyvale, CA, Proofpoint is a leading security-as-a-service (SaaS) provider of on-demand data protection solutions to large and mid-sized organizations.

Proofpoint offers cloud-based solutions for threat protection, compliance, archiving and governance, and secure communications. Organizations around the world depend on its expertise, patented technologies, and on-demand delivery system to protect against phishing, malware and spam and to safeguard privacy, encrypt sensitive information, and archive and govern messages and critical enterprise information.

The company's products are sold to customers on a subscription basis and are delivered by a cloud infrastructure. Proofpoint markets and sells its solutions directly, through a network of distributors and resellers and through strategic partners.

Moreover, Proofpoint has customers across all major verticals including Aerospace and defense, education, financial services, government, healthcare, manufacturing and retail, and has maintained a renewal rate of more than 90%.

Proofpoint's revenues rallied 18% year over year to \$1.05 billion in 2020. The company has two reportable segments — Subscription (which contributed 98% to 2020 total revenues) as well as Hardware and Services (that contributed approximately 2% to total revenues).

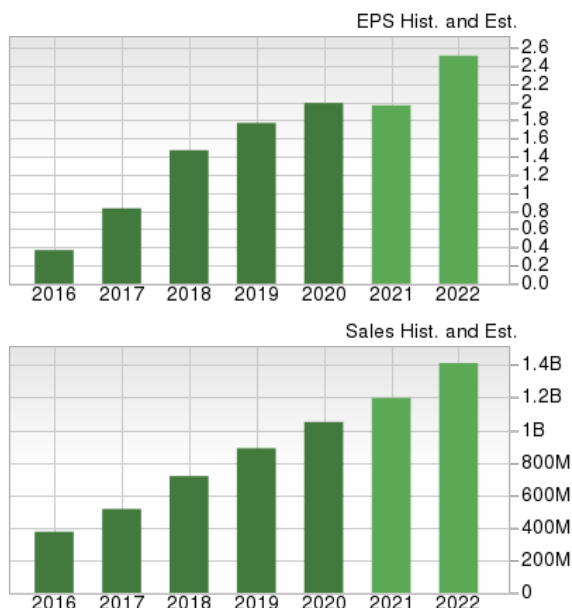
The company is in the process of transitioning to a subscription-based business model.

Subscription revenues increased 17.8% year over year in 2020, while Hardware and Services revenues increased 43.8%.

In the email and advanced threat protection area, Proofpoint faces significant competition from Cisco Systems, Inc., Microsoft Corporation, FireEye, Inc., Symantec Corporation, Mimecast Ltd, Barracuda Networks, Inc. and Google, Inc.

This apart, Micro Focus International and Veritas Technologies present sizeable competition to the company in the field of archiving.

Fortinet and Palo Alto's growing dominance in the cybersecurity market poses significant threat to Proofpoint's offerings.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ To survive in the highly competitive cyber security market, each player must continually invest in broadening its capabilities. Over the past few years, Proofpoint has invested heavily to enhance its sales and marketing capabilities, particularly by increasing the sales force. This remains a drag on the company's bottom line. Furthermore, though the company foresees these investments to garner benefit over the long run, we note that there is uncertainty about the payback period.
- ▼ Near-term prospects for Proofpoint are not promising as changing customer spending behavior recently hit several other players in this space. For the past few months, various competitors in the cyber security space noticed that the companies have been breaking their cybersecurity investment plans into phases and implementing the same over longer periods of time, instead of making a single large investment. Therefore, we are slightly cautious about the company's near-term prospects.
- ▼ Proofpoint faces competition from numerous big and small companies in the security application market. As Internet threats and attacks increase, stiff competition will follow suit. Competing firms must deliver prompt and advanced technologies to suit customer requirements and expedite product introduction in order to survive. Moreover, we believe that Proofpoint's dominance could be challenged by new entrants. This could lead the company to resort to competitive pricing to maintain and capture market share.

Since Proofpoint continues to invest in sales and marketing, we anticipate this to remain a drag on the company's bottom line in the near term.

Risks

- Cyber security is becoming a mission-critical, high-profile requirement. The long list of data breaches has brought to light the fact that a company's financial well-being, brands and reputation are today increasingly exposed to sophisticated cyber threats. The advent of cloud computing and the idea of sharing resources to lower cost have further increased demand for adequate security policies, protocols and products. As a result, companies are allotting increasing portions of their IT budgets for security solutions. Per Gartner's report, worldwide spending on data security is expected to grow 7.2% year over year to \$2.9 billion in 2020. Going by MarketsandMarkets, the global cybersecurity market size was valued at \$152.71 billion in 2018 and is projected to reach \$248.6 billion by 2023, witnessing a CAGR of 10.2% during the period. These predictions bode well for Proofpoint, which has a diversified product portfolio for large and mid-sized organizations to protect their sensitive data. Furthermore, Proofpoint has partnered with Palo Alto Networks, CyberArk, IBM, Imperva and Intel to provide best-in-class cyber security solutions to customers. Its rich experience in the security space and continued delivery of mission-critical solutions will help it to grow market share.
 - Proofpoint has made strategic acquisitions to expedite growth. With the buyout of Cloudmark, the company earned the opportunity to continue growing its footprint within the carrier community. As a result of its Weblife acquisition, the company brought to market a new personal email defense, which is its new browser isolation solution. The acquisition of FireLayers has helped Proofpoint in extending its Targeted Attack Protection (TAP) solution to SaaS applications and protects these from advanced malware. Same year, it acquired the Email Fraud Protection (EFP) business unit from Return Path, which helped it further enhance its Business Email Compromise (BEC) capabilities. Apart from these, the company made various other acquisitions that have not only expanded its product portfolio but also its customer and revenue base. Likewise, management remains optimistic about its most recent acquisition of Wombat Security Technologies (February 2019).
 - Proofpoint mainly focuses on selling subscription-based services. This business model generates recurring revenues and higher margins for the company (approximately 70%) than the hardware-centric model. Notably, the company garners nearly 98% of total revenues (FY20) from these services, which has helped it to maintain gross margin above 70% over the last few quarters. We believe that the strategy will continue to boost its top and the bottom lines. Proofpoint has been witnessing tremendous customer growth for its subscription-based services. We believe that continued focus on subscription-based products and services and product upgrades will enhance its top line.
 - Proofpoint had a debt free balance sheet with cash and cash equivalents and short-term investments of approximately \$910 million as of Dec 31, 2020. This enhances liquidity and can be used for funding product development and to pursue growth strategies like acquisitions.
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Last Earnings Report

Proofpoint Beats Q4 Earnings & Revenue Estimates

Proofpoint reported fourth-quarter 2020 non-GAAP earnings of 51 cents per share, outpacing the Zacks Consensus Estimate of 42 cents. However, the figure is a penny lower than the year-ago quarter's earnings of 52 cents per share.

Revenues came in at \$275.1 million in the fourth quarter, which beat the consensus mark of \$269.1 and increased 13% year over year as well.

This upside in top-line results can be attributed to strong demand for the firm's next-generation cloud security and compliance platform, ongoing migration to the cloud, solid international growth, and high renewal rates.

Top Line Details

Total billings during the reported quarter grew 8% year on year to \$374.9 million.

Subscription revenues came in at \$271.4 million, up 12.9% from the year-ago quarter. In addition, hardware and service revenues climbed 21.4% year over year to \$3.7 million.

The company has stopped reporting results for its advanced threat and compliance-oriented products as it believes the data is not informative in terms of measuring business performance.

Proofpoint continues to expand globally. Its international business grew 20% year over year, accounting for 21% of the total revenues during the December-end quarter.

Operating Details

Non-GAAP gross profit climbed 14.2% from the year-ago quarter to \$221.6 million. Non-GAAP gross margin expanded 100 basis points (bps) to 81% on impressive revenue performance.

Proofpoint's non-GAAP operating income jumped 17% to \$43.3 million.

Balance Sheet & Cash Flow

As of Dec 31, 2020, the company's cash, cash equivalents and short-term investments were \$910.3 million compared with \$1.02 billion as of Sep 30, 2020.

The company generated operating cash flow of \$55.7 million compared with the \$76.4 million reported in the year-ago quarter. Free cash flow was \$28.9 million compared with the year-ago quarter's \$65.1 million.

During full-year 2020, Proofpoint generated operating and free cash flows of \$264.5 million and \$192.1 million, respectively.

Guidance

Proofpoint issued its outlook for first-quarter and full-year 2021. For the March-end quarter, Proofpoint anticipates revenues of \$280-\$282 million.

Non-GAAP gross margin is estimated to be 80%. Non-GAAP earnings per share are predicted in the band of 39-40 cents.

Free cash flow is estimated in the range of \$80 million to \$85 million. Capital expenditures are expected to be \$8-\$9 million for the ongoing quarter.

For 2021, the company projects revenues at \$1.19-\$1.2 billion.

Non-GAAP gross margin is expected to be 80%. Non-GAAP earnings per share are anticipated in the band of \$1.91-\$1.99.

Free cash flow is estimated in the range of \$200-\$210 million. Capital expenditure is predicted to be approximately \$45 million.

Quarter Ending	12/2020
Report Date	Feb 04, 2021
Sales Surprise	2.26%
EPS Surprise	21.43%
Quarterly EPS	0.51
Annual EPS (TTM)	1.93

Recent News

On Nov 16, Proofpoint announced that it was declared as a winner of the "Overall Enterprise Email Security Solution Provider of the Year" award by CyberSecurity Breakthrough, for its ongoing cloud-based email security innovation.

On Nov 2, Proofpoint announced that it was positioned at a Leader for the ninth consecutive year in 2020 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Information Archiving.

On Oct 13, Proofpoint announced Content Capture for Microsoft Teams, the latest compliance solution designed for global regulated organizations.

Valuation

Proofpoint's shares have increased 25.6% in the six-month period and 2.7% over the trailing 12 months. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry are up 28.3% in the past six months, while the Zacks Computer & Technology sector 29.8%. Over the past year, while the Zacks sub-industry has increased 29.1%, the sector gained 41.6%.

The S&P 500 Index has gained 19.1% over the last six months and 18.7% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 6.24X forward 12-month sales, which compares to 9.14X for the Zacks sub-industry, 5.02X for the Zacks sector and 4.57X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 8.75X and as low as 4.18X, with a 5-year median of 6.53X. Our Underperform recommendation indicates that the stock will perform worse than the market. Our \$112 price target reflects 5.30X forward 12-month sales.

The table below shows summary valuation data for PFPT

Valuation Multiples - PFPT					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/S F12M	Current	6.24	9.14	5.02	4.57
	5-Year High	8.75	9.14	5.02	4.57
	5-Year Low	4.18	5.32	2.78	3.20
	5-Year Median	6.53	6.44	3.49	3.68
P/B TTM	Current	13.16	14.42	9.8	6.7
	5-Year High	130.45	14.78	9.8	6.7
	5-Year Low	8.62	4.32	4.1	3.73
	5-Year Median	15.75	7.99	5.74	4.95
EV/Sales TTM	Current	6.24	9.62	5.85	4.41
	5-Year High	11.35	9.70	5.85	4.42
	5-Year Low	4.30	4.68	2.85	2.61
	5-Year Median	7.58	6.59	3.92	3.57

As of 02/09/2021

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 2% (247 out of 253)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Absolute Software Corporation (ABST)	Neutral	4
Check Point Software Technologies Ltd. (CHKP)	Neutral	4
Qualys, Inc. (QLYS)	Neutral	3
Radware Ltd. (RDWR)	Neutral	3
Varonis Systems, Inc. (VRNS)	Neutral	3
Zix Corporation (ZIXI)	Neutral	3
CyberArk Software Ltd. (CYBR)	Underperform	5
FireEye, Inc. (FEYE)	Underperform	5

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Security				Industry Peers		
	PFPT	X Industry	S&P 500	CYBR	FEYE	QLYS
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Underperform	-	-	Underperform	Underperform	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	5	-	-	5	5	3
VGM Score	B	-	-	F	C	B
Market Cap	7.56 B	6.23 B	27.82 B	6.17 B	4.89 B	4.95 B
# of Analysts	12	10	13	10	9	6
Dividend Yield	0.00%	0.00%	1.41%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Value Score	D	-	-	F	F	D
Cash/Price	0.14	0.09	0.06	0.14	0.19	0.07
EV/EBITDA	107.80	43.26	14.91	70.69	-56.94	43.26
PEG F1	2.54	2.70	2.41	10.83	5.51	NA
P/B	13.13	12.75	3.76	9.21	7.37	12.36
P/CF	54.91	42.08	15.61	76.72	NA	51.11
P/E F1	66.27	51.82	20.58	131.50	59.98	42.40
P/S TTM	7.20	8.29	3.05	13.73	5.20	14.02
Earnings Yield	1.51%	1.68%	4.78%	0.76%	1.68%	2.36%
Debt/Equity	1.35	0.74	0.68	0.74	1.43	0.00
Cash Flow (\$/share)	2.39	2.13	6.76	2.13	-0.18	2.54
Growth Score	B	-	-	F	A	B
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	NA%	13.90%	9.27%	13.90%	NA	40.95%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-0.38%	5.44%	13.76%	-32.41%	15.41%	4.30%
Current Cash Flow Growth	127.88%	27.15%	4.21%	28.60%	-24.85%	27.15%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	55.69%	36.01%	7.74%	40.13%	13.41%	34.15%
Current Ratio	1.64	1.64	1.38	4.47	1.69	1.70
Debt/Capital	57.39%	50.01%	41.31%	42.63%	58.88%	0.00%
Net Margin	-15.60%	0.65%	10.59%	0.65%	-22.04%	25.06%
Return on Equity	-9.09%	4.34%	14.81%	4.34%	-12.82%	20.99%
Sales/Assets	0.45	0.46	0.51	0.31	0.34	0.51
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	13.61%	12.02%	6.20%	6.51%	6.82%	12.74%
Momentum Score	A	-	-	A	D	A
Daily Price Change	0.22%	0.99%	-0.08%	0.99%	0.61%	2.36%
1-Week Price Change	0.09%	2.65%	4.58%	1.16%	1.43%	-9.99%
4-Week Price Change	-5.94%	4.61%	0.62%	0.70%	-8.28%	6.77%
12-Week Price Change	30.52%	38.72%	7.81%	54.77%	47.78%	41.98%
52-Week Price Change	2.76%	37.28%	9.04%	17.94%	40.56%	44.83%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	493,537	546,087	2,065,226	546,087	5,869,661	477,741
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	-44.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	-72.48%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	-44.00%	0.00%	0.61%	0.00%	-79.05%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	7.69%	0.00%	1.59%	-333.33%	-81.27%	1.18%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	6.49%	0.00%	0.16%	0.00%	-40.48%	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	B
Momentum Score	A
VGM Score	B

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

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Periods:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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