Selective Insurance(SIGI)

$60.12 (As of 09/01/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **$64.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months	**Zacks Recommendation:** (Since: 12/30/19) Prior Recommendation: Underperform	**Neutral**
Short Term: 1-3 Months	**Zacks Rank:** (1-5) Zacks Style Scores: Value: B | Growth: C | Momentum: F	**3-Hold** VGM:C

Summary

Selective Insurance is poised to witness top-line growth backed by sustained premium growth across its segments. Premiums have benefited from the company's compelling portfolio, high retention ratio, pure renewal price increase and new business growth. Net investment income should benefit from active portfolio management. The company estimates investment income of $170 million and $5 million from alternative investments in 2020. Geographic expansion plays a vital role in company's growth. Shares of Selective Insurance have underperformed the industry in the past year. Nevertheless, it boasts solid capital position on which it deploys capital effectively. However, it is exposed to cat loss, inducing earnings volatility. High costs exert pressure on operating margin. Its high debt level and lower times interest earned remain concern.

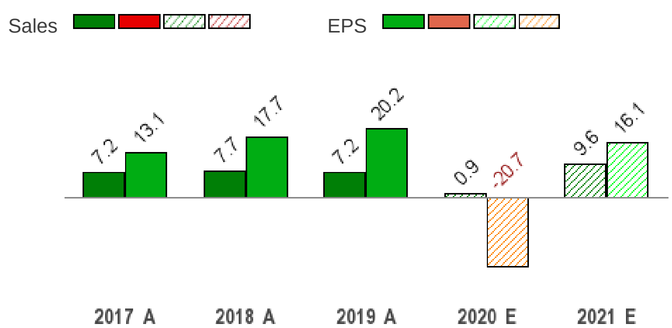
Price, Consensus & Surprise

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	**$80.65 - $37.48**
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	**263,876**
Market Cap	**$3.6 B**
Year-To-Date Price Change	**-7.8%**
Beta	**0.76**
Dividend / Dividend Yield	**$0.92 / 1.5%**
Industry	**Insurance - Property and Casualty**
Zacks Industry Rank	**Bottom 33% (169 out of 251)**
Last EPS Surprise	**8.1%**
Last Sales Surprise	**-3.8%**
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	**1.0%**
Expected Report Date	**11/04/2020**
Earnings ESP	**-3.1%**
P/E TTM	**16.8**
P/E F1	**17.3**
PEG F1	**1.6**
P/S TTM	**1.3**

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Sales Estimates (millions of $)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	764 E	776 E	790 E	802 E	3,132 E
2020	710 A	670 A	748 E	746 E	2,857 E
2019	686 A	701 A	713 A	730 A	2,832 A

EPS Estimates

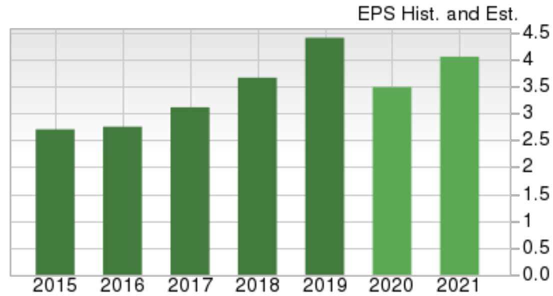
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	$0.91 E	$1.04 E	$0.95 E	$1.15 E	$4.05 E
2020	$0.84 A	$0.40 A	$1.15 E	$1.10 E	$3.49 E
2019	$0.90 A	$1.16 A	$0.97 A	$1.37 A	$4.40 A

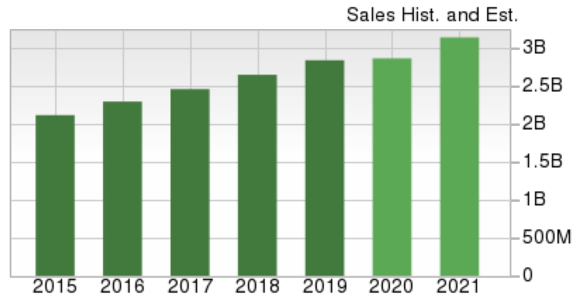
*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and Sales estimates, is as of 09/01/2020. The reports text is as of 09/02/2020.

Overview

Headquartered in Branchville, NJ, Selective Insurance Group, Inc. was established in 1925. The company operates as a P&C insurer. It offers insurance products and services across the United States. Through its subsidiaries, the P&C insurer provides a wide range of insurance products and services, which includes property, casualty as well as flood insurances. The company caters to a wide set of clients including businesses, non-profit organizations, local government agencies as well as individuals.





Selective Insurance classifies its operations through four segments, namely Standard Commercial Lines, Standard Personal Lines, Excess and Surplus (E&S) Lines plus Investments.

Standard Commercial Lines (79.8% of 2019 Net Premium Written) — This segment offers insurance products and services to commercial enterprises including businesses, non-profit organizations and local government agencies. Presently, the segment represents 78% of the total insurance operations' net premiums written (NPW) and is sold across 25 states and the District of Columbia.

Standard Personal Lines (11.3%)— The segment offers products and services mainly to individuals, who have obtained coverage in the standard marketplace. The unit represents 13% of total insurance operations' NPW and is primarily sold in 13 Eastern and Midwestern states. The company boasts being the fifth largest writer of this coverage through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and writes flood business across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Excess and Surplus Lines (8.9%)— The segment provides insurance products and services to customers with not obtained coverage in the standard marketplace. Currently, the company writes commercial lines E&S coverages with the business forming 9% of the total insurance operations' NPW and sold in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

> Geographic expansions, improving premiums, improved rate environment leading to better investment income and solid capital position well poise Selective Insurance for long term growth.

- **Improving Premiums** — Sustained premium growth across segments has helped the company's total premiums witness five-year CAGR (2015-2019) of 5.6%. However, net premiums written remained flat from the year-ago period in the first half of 2020 as it was impacted by a $75 million accrual for estimated return audit and mid-term endorsement premiums. Nonetheless, we expect premiums written to increase, given the company's compelling portfolio, improved pricing, new business growth and high retention ratio.

  Steady betterment of premiums has resulted in top-line improvement and over the past five years (2015-2019), total revenues witnessed a CAGR of 5.6%. The momentum continued through the first half of 2020 with revenues remaining almost flat year over year.

- **Net Investment Income** — Despite a low interest rate environment in the past, the company managed to deliver impressive investment results. However, net investment income decreased 17% year over year in the first half of 2020 to $74 million due to losses from other investments portfolio. Nevertheless, for 2020, Selective Insurance projects an after-tax investment income of $170 million, up from the prior guidance of $160 million. Selective Insurance estimates $5 million in after-tax net investment income from alternative investments.

- **Geographic Expansion** — The P&C insurer relies on geographic expansion for growth and diversification. Over the years, the company successfully expanded in New Hampshire along with presence in Southwest region such as Arizona, Colorado, Utah and Mexico. As a result, the company now has a total commercial lines presence in 27 states.

- **Robust Capital Position** — Selective Insurance flaunts a sound capital structure and remains committed toward protecting the interests of its policyholders and shareholders alike while improving its financial strength and underwriting capabilities. Riding on a solid capital position, the company has been hiking dividends, which register a five-year CAGR (2014-2019) of nearly 12.1%. Such steadfast endeavors buoy confidence among investors, making it an attractive pick for yield-seeking investors. Its dividend yield of 1.6% appears attractive compared with the industry average of 0.5%.

- **Price Performance** — Shares of the company has lost 23.6% in the past year, wider than the industry's increase of 1.5%. Nevertheless, the company's favorable fundamentals should aid its shares.

Reasons To Sell:

- **Stretched Valuation** — Valuation remains stretched at the current level. Looking at the company's price-to-book ratio, which is the best multiple for valuing insurers, investors might not want to pay any further premium. The company currently has a trailing 12-month P/B ratio of 1.56, higher than the industry average of 1.32.

Exposure to catastrophe loss due to natural disasters and weather-related events and elevated expenses continue to remain a concern for the company.

- **Exposure to Catastrophe Loss** — Being a property and casualty (P&C) insurer, Selective Insurance remains exposed to catastrophe loss stemming from natural disasters and weather-related events. Such a massive loss poses an inherent risk to the P&C insurance business inducing volatility to its results. Combined ratio deteriorated 370 basis points on a year-over-year basis to 97.6% in the first half of 2020. For 2020, the company estimates combined ratio, excluding catastrophe losses, between 90% and 91%, an improvement from its first-quarter 2020 guidance, which was between 92% and 93%, and 600 bps from catastrophe losses, reflecting wider-than-expected losses through the first half of the year.

- **Rising Expenses to Hurt Margin Expansion** — Selective Insurance has been witnessing rising expenses over the years, primarily due to increasing loss and loss expense incurred and amortization of deferred policy acquisition costs. The metric increased 32% over the last five years and 3.6% in the first half of 2020 to $1.3 billion. Increasing expenses have been weighing on net margin expansion. In the second quarter, net margin contracted 130 bps sequentially and 200 bps year over year. Hence, the company should strive to generate higher revenue growth rate compared with the rise in expenses. Also, expense ratio of 34.7% in the first half of 2020 deteriorated 130 bps due to the earned impact of the COVID-19 related premium items, which reduced premiums earned and increase in allowance for bad debt. The expense ratio is expected to face upward pressure due to operating costs being spread over a smaller premium base. Also, if the customers' finances are further impacted, the company has to increase allowance for bad debt, which would further affect the expense ratio in the remaining quarters.

- **Rising Debt Level:** The company's debt has been increasing over the past many years inducing deterioration in debt to capital. Though at the end of the second quarter 2020, debt level was flat from 2019-end level, total debt to total capital of 25.9% deteriorated 580 basis points from 2019-end and compared unfavorably with the industry's measure of 21.3%. In addition, times interest earned, a measure to identify the company ability to service debt was 8.6 in the second quarter, down from 11 in the fourth quarter of 2019 and compared unfavorably with the industry's measure of 8.5. This raises concerns as it indicates that its earnings are not sufficient to cover interest obligations.

Last Earnings Report

Selective Insurance's Q2 Earnings Beat, Plunge Y/Y

Quarter Ending	06/2020
Report Date	Jul 29, 2020
Sales Surprise	-3.77%
EPS Surprise	8.11%
Quarterly EPS	0.40
Annual EPS (TTM)	3.58

Selective Insurance Group, Inc. reported second-quarter 2020 operating income of 40 cents per share, beating the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 8.1%. However, the bottom line declined 65.5% from the year-ago period's number.

Selective Insurance witnessed higher net premium written, offset by higher catastrophe losses and decline in alternative investment income, which is reported on a one-quarter lag.

Behind the Headlines

Total revenues of $670 million were down 4.4% from the year-ago quarter's figure, primarily due to lower premiums earned and net investment income. Moreover, the same missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 3.7%.

Net investment income decreased 40% year over year to $28.5 million due to alternative investment losses of $16 million pre-tax, or $13 million after-tax, which are reported on a one-quarter lag, and reflected the market decline during the first quarter.

Net premiums written increased 3% year over year to $724.8 million attributable to increase in both Commercial Lines and Excess & Surplus Lines.

Total expenses increased 3.5% year over year to $639.8 million primarily due to higher loss and loss expense incurred, amortization of deferred policy acquisition costs and interest expenses.

Catastrophe losses increased 182% year over year to $83.2 million, primarily due to $43 million of losses related to two April storms and $20 million of losses related to civil unrest claims. Combined ratio deteriorated 530 basis points (bps) on a year-over-year basis to 98.4% in the quarter under review, primarily due to COVID-19-related underwriting items of $9.6 million and higher level of catastrophe losses. It is partially offset by the impact of net prior year favorable casualty reserve development, lower non-catastrophe property losses compared to the prior-year quarter and ongoing expense management initiatives.

Segmental Results

Standard Commercial Lines net premiums written were up 5% year over year to $583.3 million, attributable to increase in retention and solid renewal pure price rise. Combined ratio deteriorated 400 bps to 96.7% from the prior-year quarter's level due to higher catastrophe losses.

Standard Personal Lines net premiums written declined 5% year over year to $78.2 million due to COVID-19-related personal automobile premium credits of $4.3 million, which was partially offset by increase in new business, renewal pure price and higher retention. Combined ratio deteriorated 1470 bps on a year-over-year basis to 108.8% in the quarter under review due to higher catastrophe losses, partially offset by a reduction in non-catastrophe property losses.

Excess & Surplus Lines net premiums written grew 3% year over year to $63.2 million, primarily attributable to increase in renewal pure price and new business. Combined ratio also deteriorated 590 bps to 100.9% due to higher catastrophe losses.

Financial Update

Selective Insurance exited the second quarter with total assets of $9.3 billion, which was 6% above the level at December 2019 end. As of Jun 30, 2020, book value per share was $38.43, up 4.1% from the level as of 2019 end. Annualized operating return on equity was 6.2% in the quarter under review, down 830 basis points year over year.

2020 Guidance

The company estimates GAAP combined ratio, excluding catastrophe losses, in the range of 90% to 91%, indicating an improvement from the earlier guidance of 92%-93% provided in the first quarter.

Catastrophe losses of 6.0 points on the combined ratio have been estimated, reflecting higher-than-expected losses through the first half of the year. As COVID-19 has not been designated a catastrophe event by the Insurance Services Office's Property Claims Services unit, such losses are not included in this ratio.

The company projects an after-tax investment income of $170 million, $10 million higher than first-quarter 2020 guidance of $160 million. It now expects up to $5 million in after-tax net investment income from alternative investments.

Overall effective tax rate is expected to be approximately 18.5%, which includes an effective tax rate of 18.5% for net investment income, indicating a tax rate of 5.25% for tax-advantaged municipal bonds and a tax rate of 21% for all other items.

Recent News

Selective Insurance Estimates Q2 Cat Loss, Updates Guidance - Jul 14, 2020

Selective Insurance estimates preliminary second-quarter net catastrophe losses of $83 million, pre-tax. The expected loss could be due to the company's exposure to storms and civil unrest claims.

The company estimates second-quarter combined ratio in the range of 98% to 99%, primarily due to higher-than expected losses from catastrophic events.

Selective Insurance estimates net earnings per share ("EPS") for the second quarter in the range of 55 cents to 60 cents and operating EPS in the range of 35 cents to 40 cents, with the difference principally reflecting net realized and unrealized investment gains.

Valuation

Selective Insurance's shares are down 7.7% in the year-to-date period and 23.6% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Finance sector are down 6.8% and 14.8% in the year-to-date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and sector are up 1.5% but down 5.1%, respectively.

The S&P 500 index are up 3.8% in the year-to-date period and 15.3% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 1.56x trailing 12-month book value, which compares to 1.32x for the Zacks sub-industry, 2.55x for the Zacks sector and 4.53x for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 2.4x and as low as 1.12x, with a 5-year median of 1.82x. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our $64 price target reflects 1.66x book value.

The table below shows summary valuation data for SIGI

Valuation Multiples - SIGI

		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/B TTM	Current	1.56	1.32	2.55	4.53
	5-Year High	2.4	1.67	2.91	4.76
	5-Year Low	1.12	0.93	1.72	2.83
	5-Year Median	1.82	1.45	2.54	3.76
P/S F12M	Current	1.15	1.52	6.14	3.48
	5-Year High	1.59	10.81	6.67	3.48
	5-Year Low	0.78	1.35	4.86	2.49
	5-Year Median	1.26	1.79	6	3.04
P/E F12M	Current	15.56	26.08	16.76	23.2
	5-Year High	19.08	31.55	16.76	23.2
	5-Year Low	9.78	21.01	11.60	15.25
	5-Year Median	15.26	25.79	14.26	17.6

As of 09/01/2020

Industry Analysis **Zacks Industry Rank:** Bottom 33% (169 out of 251)

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
American Financial Group, Inc. **(AFG)**	Outperform	3
Argo Group International Holdings, Ltd. **(ARGO)**	Neutral	3
Axis Capital Holdings Limited **(AXS)**	Neutral	4
Hallmark Financial Services, Inc. **(HALL)**	Neutral	4
National General Holdings Corp **(NGHC)**	Neutral	3
Everest Re Group, Ltd. **(RE)**	Neutral	3
RenaissanceRe Holdings Ltd. **(RNR)**	Neutral	3
Alleghany Corporation **(Y)**	Neutral	2

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Insurance - Property And Casualty

	SIGI	X Industry	S&P 500	AFG	AXS	RNR
				Industry Peers		
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Outperform	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	4	3
VGM Score	C	-	-	C	C	D
Market Cap	3.60 B	1.31 B	23.95 B	5.90 B	4.10 B	9.42 B
# of Analysts	2	2	14	2	3	4
Dividend Yield	1.53%	1.27%	1.61%	2.70%	3.37%	0.76%
Value Score	B	-	-	A	C	C
Cash/Price	0.11	0.29	0.07	0.46	0.40	2.05
EV/EBITDA	8.87	5.38	13.32	3.49	9.14	-8.45
PEG F1	1.66	2.15	3.05	NA	24.97	0.83
P/B	1.56	0.95	3.21	0.98	0.86	1.38
P/CF	11.17	10.50	12.92	5.76	10.90	21.33
P/E F1	17.58	13.94	21.84	9.65	124.85	20.87
P/S TTM	1.29	0.83	2.52	0.79	0.83	2.05
Earnings Yield	5.79%	5.75%	4.39%	10.36%	0.80%	4.79%
Debt/Equity	0.24	0.24	0.70	0.31	0.38	0.17
Cash Flow ($/share)	5.38	3.12	6.93	11.57	4.47	8.62
Growth Score	C	-	-	D	C	D
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	11.01%	4.32%	10.41%	11.69%	-22.66%	-5.59%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-20.80%	-3.84%	-4.75%	-19.95%	-84.52%	-3.45%
Current Cash Flow Growth	21.30%	3.77%	5.22%	7.42%	-8.72%	3.81%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	13.47%	4.81%	8.49%	12.34%	-11.78%	-6.72%
Current Ratio	0.31	0.43	1.35	0.15	0.59	1.62
Debt/Capital	19.32%	20.03%	42.92%	23.79%	25.37%	38.10%
Net Margin	6.73%	5.15%	10.25%	3.13%	-0.41%	13.02%
Return on Equity	9.90%	6.81%	14.66%	11.34%	-1.85%	5.21%
Sales/Assets	0.31	0.31	0.50	0.11	0.19	0.17
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	1.00%	0.00%	-1.40%	-34.34%	-6.60%	24.10%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	D	F	D
Daily Price Change	0.52%	0.00%	0.29%	-0.40%	1.95%	0.13%
1-Week Price Change	5.46%	2.31%	2.59%	4.80%	7.47%	6.36%
4-Week Price Change	9.77%	3.78%	3.53%	8.56%	19.40%	1.82%
12-Week Price Change	6.56%	-1.11%	2.09%	-6.80%	13.81%	-2.73%
52-Week Price Change	-23.61%	-14.15%	4.31%	-34.47%	-22.54%	-1.23%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	263,876	149,978	1,816,754	407,395	1,071,655	264,108
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	1.01%	0.00%	0.20%	-1.95%	0.00%	9.47%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	2.20%	-2.09%	3.86%	-0.34%	-52.82%	-5.92%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	8.02%	0.00%	0.00%	11.51%	0.00%	-3.49%

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Zacks Style Scores

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

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

Value Score	B
Growth Score	C
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	C

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

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

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

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

4-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 20 trading days or past 4 weeks. This is a mediumterm 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 mostrecent 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.