STANDARD & POOR'S RATINGS SERVICES

RatingsDirect®

Criteria | Corporates | General:

Methodology: Business Risk/Financial Risk Matrix Expanded

Criteria Officer:
Mark Puccia, Managing Director, New York (1) 212-438-7233; mark.puccia@standardandpoors.com

Table Of Contents

Criteria | Corporates | General:

Methodology: Business Risk/Financial Risk Matrix Expanded

*(**Editor's Note:** Table 1 in this criteria article supersedes table 1 in the articles titled: Key Credit Factors: "Global Criteria For Rating Real Estate Companies," published on June 21, 2011; "Methodology And Assumptions On Risks In The Global High Technology Industry," published Oct. 15, 2009; "Methodology And Assumptions On Risks In The Hotel And Lodging Industry," published Aug. 11, 2009; "Methodology And Assumptions On Risks In The Mining Industry," published June 23, 2009; "Business And Financial Risks In The Auto Component Suppliers Industry," published Jan. 28, 2009; "Business And Financial Risks In The U.S. For-Profit Health Care Facilities Industry," published Jan. 21, 2009; and "Business And Financial Risks In The Retail Industry," published Sept. 18, 2008.)*

1. Standard & Poor's Ratings Services is refining its methodology for corporate ratings related to its business risk/financial risk matrix, which we published as part of "2008 Corporate Ratings Criteria" on April 15, 2008. We subsequently updated this matrix in the article "Criteria Methodology: Business Risk/Financial Risk Matrix Expanded," published May 27, 2009. In order to provide greater transparency on the methodology used to evaluate corporate ratings, this article updates table 1 of the May 27, 2009, article to reflect how we analyze companies with an excellent business risk profile and minimal financial risk profile, as well as companies with a vulnerable business risk profile and a highly leveraged financial risk profile. This article amends and supersedes both the 2008 and 2009 articles mentioned above. This article is related to "Principles Of Credit Ratings," published on Feb. 16, 2011.

2. We introduced the business risk/financial risk matrix in 2005. The relationships depicted in the matrix represent an essential element of our corporate analytical methodology (see table 1).

Table 1

Business And Financial Risk Profile Matrix

Business Risk Profile	--Financial Risk Profile--					
	Minimal	Modest	Intermediate	Significant	Aggressive	Highly Leveraged
Excellent	AAA/AA+	AA	A	A-	BBB	--
Strong	AA	A	A-	BBB	BB	BB-
Satisfactory	A-	BBB+	BBB	BB+	BB-	B+
Fair	--	BBB-	BB+	BB	BB-	B
Weak	--	--	BB	BB-	B+	B-
Vulnerable	--	--	--	B+	B	B- or below

These rating outcomes are shown for guidance purposes only. Actual rating should be within one notch of indicated rating outcomes.

3. The rating outcomes refer to issuer credit ratings. The ratings indicated in each cell of the matrix are the midpoints of a range of likely rating possibilities. This range would ordinarily span one notch above and below the indicated rating.

Business Risk/Financial Risk Framework

4. Our corporate analytical methodology organizes the analytical process according to a common framework, and it divides the task into several categories so that all salient issues are considered. The first categories involve fundamental business analysis; the financial analysis categories follow.

5. Our ratings analysis starts with the assessment of the business and competitive profile of the company. Two companies with identical financial metrics can be rated very differently, to the extent that their business challenges and prospects differ. The categories underlying our business and financial risk assessments are:

Business risk

- Country risk
- Industry risk
- Competitive position
- Profitability/Peer group comparisons

Financial risk

- Accounting
- Financial governance and policies/risk tolerance
- Cash flow adequacy
- Capital structure/asset protection
- Liquidity/short-term factors

6. We do not have any predetermined weights for these categories. The significance of specific factors varies from situation to situation.

Updated Matrix

7. We developed the matrix to make explicit the rating outcomes that are typical for various business risk/financial risk combinations. It illustrates the relationship of business and financial risk profiles to the issuer credit rating.

8. We tend to weight business risk slightly more than financial risk when differentiating among investment-grade ratings. Conversely, we place slightly more weight on financial risk for speculative-grade issuers (see table 1, again).

9. This version of the matrix represents a refinement--not any change in rating criteria or standards--and, consequently, no rating changes are expected. However, the expanded matrix should enhance the transparency of the analytical process.

Financial Benchmarks

Table 2

Financial Risk Indicative Ratios (Corporates)

	FFO/Debt (%)	Debt/EBITDA (x)	Debt/Capital (%)
Minimal	greater than 60	less than 1.5	less than 25

Table 2

Financial Risk Indicative Ratios (Corporates) (cont.)			
Modest	45-60	1.5-2.0	25-35
Intermediate	30-45	2-3	35-45
Significant	20-30	3-4	45-50
Aggressive	12-20	4-5	50-60
Highly Leveraged	less than 12	greater than 5	greater than 60

How To Use The Matrix--And Its Limitations

10. The rating matrix indicative outcomes are what we typically observe--but are not meant to be precise indications or guarantees of future rating opinions. Positive and negative nuances in our analysis may lead to a notch higher or lower than the outcomes indicated in the various cells of the matrix.

11. In certain situations there may be specific, overarching risks that are outside the standard framework, e.g., a liquidity crisis, major litigation, or large acquisition. This often is the case regarding issuers at the lowest end of the credit spectrum--i.e., the 'CCC' category and lower. These ratings, by definition, reflect some impending crisis or acute vulnerability, and the balanced approach that underlies the matrix framework just does not lend itself to such situations.

12. Similarly, some matrix cells are blank because the underlying combinations are highly unusual--and presumably would involve complicated factors and analysis.

13. The following hypothetical example illustrates how the tables can be used to better understand our rating process (see tables 1 and 2).

14. We believe that Company ABC has a satisfactory business risk profile, typical of a low investment-grade industrial issuer. If we believed its financial risk were intermediate, the expected rating outcome should be within one notch of 'BBB'. ABC's ratios of cash flow to debt (35%) and debt leverage (total debt to EBITDA of 2.5x) are indeed characteristic of intermediate financial risk.

15. It might be possible for Company ABC to be upgraded to the 'A' category by, for example, reducing its debt burden to the point that financial risk is viewed as minimal. Funds from operations (FFO) to debt of more than 60% and debt to EBITDA of only 1.5x would, in most cases, indicate minimal financial risk.

16. Conversely, ABC may choose to become more financially aggressive--perhaps it decides to reward shareholders by borrowing to repurchase its stock. It is possible that the company may fall into the 'BB' category if we view its financial risk as significant. FFO to debt of 20% and debt to EBITDA of 4x would, in our view, typify the significant financial risk category.

17. Still, it is essential to realize that the financial benchmarks are guidelines, neither gospel nor guarantees. They can vary in nonstandard cases: For example, if a company's financial measures exhibit very little volatility, benchmarks may be somewhat more relaxed.

18. Moreover, our assessment of financial risk is not as simplistic as looking at a few ratios. It encompasses:

- A view of accounting and disclosure practices;
- A view of corporate governance, financial policies, and risk tolerance;
- The degree of capital intensity, flexibility regarding capital expenditures and other cash needs, including acquisitions and shareholder distributions; and
- Various aspects of liquidity--including the risk of refinancing near-term maturities.

19. The matrix addresses a company's standalone credit profile, and does not take account of external influences, which would pertain in the case of government-related entities or subsidiaries that in our view may benefit or suffer from affiliation with a stronger or weaker group. The matrix refers only to local-currency ratings, rather than foreign-currency ratings, which incorporate additional transfer and convertibility risks. Finally, the matrix does not apply to project finance or corporate securitizations.

Related Criteria And Research

- Principles Of Credit Ratings, Feb. 16, 2011
- Criteria Methodology: Business Risk/Financial Risk Matrix Expanded, May 27, 2009
- 2008 Corporate Ratings Criteria, April 15, 2008

20. These criteria represent the specific application of fundamental principles that define credit risk and ratings opinions. Their use is determined by issuer- or issue-specific attributes as well as Standard & Poor's Ratings Services' assessment of the credit and, if applicable, structural risks for a given issuer or issue rating. Methodology and assumptions may change from time to time as a result of market and economic conditions, issuer- or issue-specific factors, or new empirical evidence that would affect our credit judgment.

Copyright © 2013 by Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC. All rights reserved.

No content (including ratings, credit-related analyses and data, valuations, model, software or other application or output therefrom) or any part thereof (Content) may be modified, reverse engineered, reproduced or distributed in any form by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC or its affiliates (collectively, S&P). The Content shall not be used for any unlawful or unauthorized purposes. S&P and any third-party providers, as well as their directors, officers, shareholders, employees or agents (collectively S&P Parties) do not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, timeliness or availability of the Content. S&P Parties are not responsible for any errors or omissions (negligent or otherwise), regardless of the cause, for the results obtained from the use of the Content, or for the security or maintenance of any data input by the user. The Content is provided on an "as is" basis. S&P PARTIES DISCLAIM ANY AND ALL EXPRESS OR IMPLIED WARRANTIES, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ANY WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE OR USE, FREEDOM FROM BUGS, SOFTWARE ERRORS OR DEFECTS, THAT THE CONTENT'S FUNCTIONING WILL BE UNINTERRUPTED, OR THAT THE CONTENT WILL OPERATE WITH ANY SOFTWARE OR HARDWARE CONFIGURATION. In no event shall S&P Parties be liable to any party for any direct, indirect, incidental, exemplary, compensatory, punitive, special or consequential damages, costs, expenses, legal fees, or losses (including, without limitation, lost income or lost profits and opportunity costs or losses caused by negligence) in connection with any use of the Content even if advised of the possibility of such damages.

Credit-related and other analyses, including ratings, and statements in the Content are statements of opinion as of the date they are expressed and not statements of fact. S&P's opinions, analyses, and rating acknowledgment decisions (described below) are not recommendations to purchase, hold, or sell any securities or to make any investment decisions, and do not address the suitability of any security. S&P assumes no obligation to update the Content following publication in any form or format. The Content should not be relied on and is not a substitute for the skill, judgment and experience of the user, its management, employees, advisors and/or clients when making investment and other business decisions. S&P does not act as a fiduciary or an investment advisor except where registered as such. While S&P has obtained information from sources it believes to be reliable, S&P does not perform an audit and undertakes no duty of due diligence or independent verification of any information it receives.

To the extent that regulatory authorities allow a rating agency to acknowledge in one jurisdiction a rating issued in another jurisdiction for certain regulatory purposes, S&P reserves the right to assign, withdraw, or suspend such acknowledgement at any time and in its sole discretion. S&P Parties disclaim any duty whatsoever arising out of the assignment, withdrawal, or suspension of an acknowledgment as well as any liability for any damage alleged to have been suffered on account thereof.

S&P keeps certain activities of its business units separate from each other in order to preserve the independence and objectivity of their respective activities. As a result, certain business units of S&P may have information that is not available to other S&P business units. S&P has established policies and procedures to maintain the confidentiality of certain nonpublic information received in connection with each analytical process.

S&P may receive compensation for its ratings and certain analyses, normally from issuers or underwriters of securities or from obligors. S&P reserves the right to disseminate its opinions and analyses. S&P's public ratings and analyses are made available on its Web sites, www.standardandpoors.com (free of charge), and www.ratingsdirect.com and www.globalcreditportal.com (subscription) and www.spcapitaliq.com (subscription) and may be distributed through other means, including via S&P publications and third-party redistributors. Additional information about our ratings fees is available at www.standardandpoors.com/usratingsfees.

McGRAW-HILL