

Kimberly-Clark (KMB) EQ Update-12/18 Quarter

Current EQ Rating*	Previous EQ Rating
3-	4-

*For an explanation of the EQ Review Rating scale, please refer to the end of this report

After reviewing the 10-K, we are reducing our earnings quality rating on KMB to 3- (Minor Concern) from 4- (Acceptable).

- The inventory component detail in the 10-K indicates that despite the continuing decline in inventory days (DSI) LIFO inventories are still rising which minimizes concern that the company is artificially boosting gross margins by liquidating LIFO layers.
- Despite the declines in total inventory, days payable jumped by 8 days over the 12/17 quarter. With the company now taking over 90 days to pay suppliers, we are skeptical that it has much room to push cash flow growth by extending terms. Note that the movement in trade payables added \$392 million to cash flow growth for the year ended 12/18. Cash flow from operations was essentially flat in 2018 as lower earnings and higher restructuring payments and pension contributions offset working capital and lower tax payments.
- As we noted in our original review of the quarter, we have always been critical of the recurring nature of the company's restructuring charges. The current 2018 plan is expected to run through 2020. We will be watching for any increase in the scope of the 2018 plan or the announcement of any new activities.

Explanation of EQ Rating Scale

6- "Exceptionally Strong"	Indicates uncommonly conservative accounting policies to the point that revenue and earnings are essentially understated relative to the company's peers. Higher possibility of reporting positive earnings surprises
5- "Strong"	Indicates the company has no areas of concern with its reported results and we see very little risk of the company disappointing due to recent results being overstated from aggressive reporting in recent periods.
4- "Acceptable"	Indicates the company may have exhibited a minor "red flag", but the severity of the issue is not yet a concern. Minimal risk of an earnings disappointment resulting from previous earnings or cash flow overstatement
3- "Minor Concern"	Indicates the company has exhibited either a larger number of or more serious warning signs than companies receiving a 4. The likelihood of an immediate earnings or cash flow disappointment is not considered to be high, but the signs mentioned deserve a higher degree of attention in the future.
2- "Weak"	Indicates the company's recent reported results have benefitted materially from aggressive accounting. Follow up work should be performed to determine the nature and extent of the problem. There is a possibility that upcoming results could disappoint as the impact of unsustainable benefits disappears.
1- "Strong Concerns"	Indicates that the company's recent results are significantly overstated and that we view a disappointment in upcoming quarters is highly likely.

In addition to the numerical rating, the EQ Review Rating may also include either a minus or plus sign. A minus sign indicates that our analysis shows the overall earnings quality of the company has worsened since the last review and there is a possibility the numerical rating will fall should the problem continue into the next quarter. Likewise, a positive sign indicates that the overall earnings quality is improving, and the company may see an upgrade in its numerical rating should the trend continue.

Key Points to Understand About the EQ Score

The EQ Review Rating is much more than a blind, quantitative scoring method. While we utilize proprietary adjustments, ratios, and methods developed over decades of earnings quality analysis, the foundation of all of our analysis is reading recent SEC filings, press releases, conference call transcripts and in some cases, conversations with managements.

The EQ Review Rating is not comparable to a traditional buy/sell rating. The Rating is intended to specifically convey the extent to which reported earnings may be over/understated. Fundamental factors such as forecasts for future growth, increasing competition, and valuation are not reflected in the rating. Therefore, a high score does not in itself indicate a company is a buy but rather indicates that recent results are a good indication of the underlying earnings and cash generation capacity of the company. A low score (1-2) will likely result in us performing a more thorough review of fundamental factors to determine if the company warrants a full-blown sell recommendation.

Disclosure

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