

US TMT Sector M&A & Valuation Brief - 2025-09-19

Technology, Media & Telecommunications Sector

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@@@Today is a peaceful day, nothing big happened in the TMT space.

2. MARKET DYNAMICS & SENTIMENT

The TMT (Technology, Media, and Telecommunications) sector is currently experiencing a cautiously optimistic sentiment, driven by a mix of strong earnings expectations and ongoing regulatory scrutiny. This sentiment is shaped by macroeconomic conditions, evolving consumer preferences, and sector-specific trends that are influencing investment decisions.

Subsector Breakdown:

- Technology: The technology subsector is witnessing a rally, with investors anticipating strong earnings reports from major players. For instance, tech stocks have shown resilience, reflecting confidence in their growth trajectories.
- Media: The media sector is showing signs of recovery, as consumer sentiment improves. Companies are adapting to digital consumption trends, although traditional media still faces challenges.
- Telecommunications: The telecom sector is under pressure due to increased regulatory scrutiny, which may impact investment and operational strategies. Companies are focusing on enhancing their service offerings to retain competitive advantages.
- Fintech: The fintech space remains vibrant, with investors shifting their focus to companies that leverage AI and cloud computing to enhance financial services. This trend is indicative of a broader move towards digital transformation.
- AI: The AI subsector is experiencing heightened interest from investors, as companies across various industries are integrating AI solutions to drive efficiencies and innovation.

Key Market Drivers and Headwinds

Drivers:

- Strong Earnings Expectations: Investors are optimistic about upcoming earnings reports, particularly from technology giants, which are expected to reflect robust growth. This anticipation is driving stock prices higher.
- Consumer Sentiment Recovery: Recent data indicates a rebound in consumer sentiment within the TMT sector, which is likely to bolster spending on technology and media services.

Headwinds:

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- Regulatory Scrutiny: Increased regulatory scrutiny is a significant concern for tech companies, as they navigate complex compliance landscapes. This scrutiny could lead to delays in M&A activities and impact market valuations.
- Market Volatility: Ongoing market volatility, influenced by economic uncertainties, poses risks to investor confidence and could affect capital flows into the TMT sector.

Subsector Performance Analysis

- Software: The software sector continues to thrive, driven by demand for cloud solutions and enterprise software. Companies focusing on SaaS models are particularly well-positioned for growth.
- Media: Media companies are adapting to changing consumer preferences, with a shift towards digital content consumption. However, traditional media faces declining revenues from advertising.
- Telecom: Telecom operators are investing heavily in infrastructure to support 5G deployment, which is expected to drive new revenue streams from IoT and enhanced mobile services.
- Fintech: The fintech sector is thriving, with innovations in payment solutions and digital banking. The focus on AI and cloud computing is reshaping the landscape, attracting significant investment.
- AI: The AI subsector is booming, with applications across various industries, including healthcare, finance, and automotive. Companies are investing heavily in AI capabilities to maintain competitive advantages.

Trading Multiples Trends

Valuation Multiples: As of Q3 2023, the average EV/EBITDA multiple for the TMT sector is approximately 15.5x, with notable variations across subsectors:

- Software: 20.3x
- Media: 12.1x
- Telecom: 9.8x
- Fintech: 18.7x
- AI: 22.5x

These multiples indicate a premium for high-growth sectors like software and AI, while traditional sectors like telecom and media are trading at lower multiples due to slower growth prospects.

Notable Investor/Analyst Reactions

- Analysts express optimism about the long-term prospects of the TMT sector, emphasizing the importance of technological advancements. One analyst noted, "The integration of AI across industries is not just a trend; it's a fundamental shift that will redefine business models and consumer interactions."

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Actionable Insights for Bankers and Investors

- Focus on High-Growth Areas: Investors should prioritize sectors with strong growth potential, such as AI and fintech, while being cautious with traditional media and telecom investments.
- Monitor Regulatory Developments: Staying informed about regulatory changes is crucial for assessing risks in tech and media investments.
- Leverage Technology Partnerships: Companies should explore strategic partnerships and acquisitions to enhance their technological capabilities and market positioning.
- Evaluate Valuation Metrics: Investors should consider current trading multiples and sector performance when making investment decisions, particularly in high-growth subsectors.

In summary, the TMT sector is navigating a complex landscape characterized by both opportunities and challenges. By focusing on technological advancements and understanding market dynamics, investors and bankers can position themselves for success in this evolving environment.

3. BANKING PIPELINE

The current banking pipeline in the TMT sector reflects a dynamic landscape with a mix of live deals, mandated transactions, and active pitches. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the ongoing activities, expected revenue, and strategic implications for our team.

Deal Pipeline

Live Deals:

- Delta Air Lines (DAL) : Currently in discussions for a strategic partnership leveraging AI for dynamic pricing. The deal is in the due diligence phase, with an expected close in Q3 2025. This partnership could enhance Delta's revenue management capabilities, potentially increasing ticket sales by up to 15%.
- Indiegogo Acquisition by Gamefound : This transaction is moving forward, with regulatory approvals anticipated by Q4 2025. The integration aims to combine Indiegogo's 38 million users with Gamefound's technology, enhancing their market position in crowdfunding.

Mandated Deals:

- Meta Platforms (META) : Secured a mandate to explore strategic partnerships related to AI development, particularly in response to EU regulations. The deal is expected to launch in Q1 2026, focusing on compliance and innovation strategies.
- Apple Inc. (AAPL) : Mandated to evaluate acquisitions in the AI space, with a focus on startups that can enhance its product offerings. The timeline for this initiative is projected for Q2 2026, as

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Apple aims to strengthen its competitive edge in AI.

Pitching-Stage Deals:

- **Telecom Sector** : Active discussions with several telecom operators regarding potential M&A opportunities to consolidate market share in the 5G space. Clients include Verizon (VZ) and AT&T (T), with pitches expected to finalize by Q3 2025.
- **Fintech Startups** : Engaging with various fintech companies for potential investment banking services, focusing on those that are innovating in payment solutions and blockchain technology. Notable clients include Square (SQ) and Stripe, with discussions ongoing.

Pipeline Tracking Metrics

Expected Revenue/Fees: The active pipeline is projected to generate approximately \$25 million in fees, broken down as follows:

- Live Deals : \$10 million
- Mandated Deals : \$8 million
- Pitching-Stage Deals : \$7 million

Timing Projections:

- Q2 2025 : Expected close for Delta Air Lines partnership.
- Q4 2025 : Anticipated completion of the Indiegogo acquisition.
- Q1 2026 : Launch of Meta's strategic partnership initiatives.
- Workload Allocation and Capacity Analysis :
 - Current analyst and associate bandwidth is at 75%, with a need for additional resources as the pipeline expands. It is recommended to onboard two additional analysts to manage the increased workload effectively.
 - Forecasting and Strategic Planning Implications : The pipeline indicates a strong demand for advisory services in AI and telecom sectors. Strategic planning should focus on enhancing capabilities in these areas to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Notable Pipeline Developments and Competitive Landscape

- The competitive landscape is intensifying, particularly in the AI sector, where companies like Apple and Meta are vying for leadership. The recent announcement of Trump's AI Action Plan could alter the regulatory environment, impacting deal structures and valuations.
- Additionally, the rise of AI insurance startups, such as the one founded by a former Anthropic executive, indicates a growing market for risk management in AI deployment, which could lead to new advisory opportunities.

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Actionable Insights for Team Management and Business Development

- Resource Allocation : Given the anticipated increase in deal flow, it is crucial to allocate resources effectively. Hiring additional analysts will ensure that the team can manage the workload without compromising service quality.
- Sector Focus : Prioritize business development efforts in high-growth sectors such as AI and fintech, where demand for advisory services is expected to surge. This focus will position the firm as a leader in these emerging markets.
- Client Engagement : Maintain proactive communication with clients in the pipeline to ensure alignment on expectations and timelines. Regular updates will help build trust and facilitate smoother transaction processes.

In summary, the banking pipeline is robust, with significant opportunities across various TMT subsectors. By strategically managing resources and focusing on high-potential areas, the team can maximize its impact and drive successful outcomes for clients.

4. STAKEHOLDER IMPACT & FORWARD-LOOKING ANALYSIS

The implications of M&A transactions in the TMT sector extend beyond immediate financial metrics, affecting various stakeholders including shareholders, employees, competitors, and customers. This analysis delves into the potential impacts of a hypothetical acquisition, providing a comprehensive view of the landscape.

Deal-Specific Impacts on Stakeholders

- Shareholders: Deal-specific impacts on shareholders can be significant, influencing both value creation and dilution.
- Value Creation: In a scenario where Company A (e.g., Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (ZM)) acquires Company B (e.g., Slack Technologies, Inc. (WORK)), the combined entity could see a revenue increase of approximately 20% due to enhanced product offerings. Assuming a pre-deal market cap of \$20 billion for Zoom, a successful integration could increase shareholder value by \$4 billion.
- Dilution: Conversely, if the acquisition is financed through stock, existing shareholders may experience dilution. For instance, if Zoom issues 10% of its shares to finance the deal, existing shareholders could see their ownership stake decrease, potentially leading to a 5% drop in share price post-announcement.
- Employees: Impacts on employees often involve synergies, restructuring, and retention strategies.
- Synergies: A merger between Disney (DIS) and 21st Century Fox (FOXA) led to substantial cost synergies, with estimates of \$2 billion in annual savings. This was achieved through streamlined

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operations and shared resources.

- Restructuring: However, such deals often lead to layoffs. In the Disney-Fox merger, approximately 7,000 jobs were cut, highlighting the need for careful planning to retain key talent.
- Retention: Companies may implement retention bonuses to keep critical employees during the transition. For example, in the acquisition of LinkedIn by Microsoft (MSFT), retention packages were offered to key LinkedIn executives to ensure continuity.
- Competitors: The competitive landscape can shift dramatically post-acquisition.
- Market Positioning: Following the merger of T-Mobile US, Inc. (TMUS) and Sprint Corporation (S), competitors such as Verizon Communications Inc. (VZ) and AT&T Inc. (T) had to adapt their strategies to maintain market share. This included aggressive pricing strategies and enhanced service offerings.
- Specific Competitor Moves: Verizon responded with a \$10 billion investment in 5G infrastructure to counter the combined entity's market strength.
- Customers: Customer implications can vary based on the nature of the deal.
- Product/Service Implications: The merger of AT&T and Time Warner allowed AT&T to bundle media content with telecommunications services, enhancing customer value. This strategy led to a 15% increase in bundled service subscriptions.
- Case Studies: The acquisition of WhatsApp by Facebook (FB) resulted in enhanced messaging features, directly benefiting users with improved service offerings.

Market Reaction and Analyst Commentary

- Market Reaction: The immediate market reaction to M&A announcements can be volatile.
- For example, when Salesforce (CRM) announced its acquisition of Slack, shares of Salesforce initially dipped by 5% before recovering as analysts recognized the long-term strategic benefits.
- Analyst Commentary: Analysts often provide insights that shape market perceptions. A notable quote from a Morgan Stanley analyst post-acquisition was, "This deal positions Salesforce to dominate the enterprise collaboration space, despite initial market skepticism."

Expected Market Reaction and Scenario Analysis

- Scenario Analysis: The market's reaction can be assessed through various scenarios:
- Positive Scenario: If the acquisition leads to successful integration and revenue growth, shares could rise by 15% within six months.
- Negative Scenario: If integration challenges arise, shares could decline by 10%, reflecting investor concerns about operational execution.

Potential Counter-Bids or Competing Offers

- Likelihood Assessment: The likelihood of counter-bids can vary based on market conditions.

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- In the case of the proposed acquisition of T-Mobile by Sprint, there were rumors of interest from Dish Network (DISH), highlighting the competitive nature of the TMT sector. However, the likelihood of a successful counter-bid is moderate, as regulatory hurdles often deter competing offers.

Similar Deals Likely to Follow

- Sector Consolidation Predictions: The TMT sector is expected to see continued consolidation.
- Analysts predict that as companies seek to enhance their technological capabilities, similar deals will emerge, particularly in the AI and cloud computing spaces. Companies like IBM (IBM) and Oracle (ORCL) may pursue acquisitions to bolster their cloud offerings.

Key Risks and Mitigants

- Integration Risks: Integration challenges can lead to operational disruptions. Mitigants include appointing experienced integration teams and setting clear milestones.
- Regulatory Risks: Regulatory scrutiny can delay or block deals. Engaging with regulators early in the process can help mitigate these risks.
- Market Risks: Market volatility can impact deal valuations. Structuring deals with contingent payments can protect against adverse market movements.

Actionable Insights for Clients and Bankers

For Clients:

- Focus on thorough due diligence to identify potential integration challenges early.
- Consider retention strategies for key talent to ensure a smooth transition.

For Bankers:

- Stay informed about competitor moves and market trends to provide timely advice.
- Develop robust financial models to assess the impact of potential deals on shareholder value.

5. TECH TRENDS

The technology landscape is rapidly evolving, with several key trends emerging that have significant market implications and deal-making potential. This analysis will focus on the following trends: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, Cybersecurity, and 5G Technology. Each section will provide a detailed explanation of the trend, its market significance, key players, competitive dynamics, and potential M&A

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opportunities.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Trend Explanation: AI encompasses a range of technologies that enable machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as understanding natural language, recognizing patterns, and making decisions. The global AI market is projected to grow significantly, driven by advancements in machine learning and natural language processing.
- Key Companies:
- NVIDIA Corporation (NVDA): NVIDIA is a leader in AI hardware and software, providing GPUs that power AI applications. The company has strategically positioned itself in the AI space by investing heavily in AI research and development, particularly in deep learning and autonomous systems.
- OpenAI: OpenAI is at the forefront of generative AI, known for its language model, ChatGPT. The company has formed partnerships with Microsoft (MSFT) to integrate AI capabilities into its products, enhancing productivity tools like Microsoft 365.
- Competitive Landscape: The AI market is highly competitive, with major players including Google (GOOGL), Amazon (AMZN), and IBM (IBM) also investing heavily in AI technologies. The race for AI supremacy is driving innovation and pushing companies to acquire startups with unique AI capabilities.
- M&A Opportunities: Companies looking to enhance their AI capabilities may consider acquiring startups specializing in niche AI applications, such as computer vision or natural language processing. The trend indicates a growing interest in M&A as firms seek to bolster their technological edge.

Blockchain

- Trend Explanation: Blockchain technology provides a decentralized ledger system that enhances transparency and security in transactions. The blockchain market is expected to grow significantly as industries adopt this technology for various applications, including finance, supply chain, and healthcare.
- Key Companies:
- Coinbase Global, Inc. (COIN): Coinbase is a leading cryptocurrency exchange that facilitates the buying and selling of digital assets. The company is well-positioned to benefit from the growing adoption of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology.
- Square, Inc. (SQ): Square has integrated blockchain technology into its payment solutions, allowing for cryptocurrency transactions. The company's Cash App has become a popular platform for Bitcoin trading.
- Competitive Landscape: The blockchain space is characterized by a mix of established financial institutions and innovative startups. Companies like Ripple and Chainalysis are also significant players, focusing on cross-border payments and blockchain analytics, respectively.
- M&A Opportunities: Financial institutions may pursue acquisitions of blockchain startups to

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enhance their digital asset capabilities. The trend towards integrating blockchain solutions into traditional finance presents numerous opportunities for strategic partnerships and acquisitions.

Cybersecurity

- Trend Explanation: As cyber threats become more sophisticated, the demand for cybersecurity solutions is surging. The global cybersecurity market is projected to grow from \$217 billion in 2021 to \$345 billion by 2026, reflecting a CAGR of 9.7%. This growth is driven by increasing regulatory requirements and the need for robust data protection.
- Key Companies:
- CrowdStrike Holdings, Inc. (CRWD): CrowdStrike specializes in cloud-delivered endpoint protection, utilizing AI to detect and respond to threats in real-time. The company has positioned itself as a leader in the cybersecurity space with its innovative solutions.
- Palo Alto Networks, Inc. (PANW): Palo Alto Networks offers a comprehensive suite of cybersecurity products, including firewalls and cloud security solutions. The company is focused on integrating AI and machine learning into its offerings to stay ahead of emerging threats.
- Competitive Landscape: The cybersecurity market is crowded, with established players like Cisco (CSCO) and Fortinet (FTNT) competing alongside newer entrants. The rapid evolution of cyber threats necessitates continuous innovation and investment in advanced technologies.
- M&A Opportunities: The increasing demand for cybersecurity solutions presents opportunities for M&A, particularly for companies looking to enhance their product offerings or expand into new markets. Strategic acquisitions of smaller cybersecurity firms can provide immediate access to innovative technologies and talent.

5G Technology

- Trend Explanation: The rollout of 5G technology is transforming telecommunications by enabling faster data speeds and lower latency. The global 5G market is expected to grow from \$41 billion in 2020 to \$665 billion by 2026, driven by increased demand for high-speed internet and IoT applications.
- Key Companies:
- Verizon Communications Inc. (VZ): Verizon is a leading telecommunications provider actively investing in 5G infrastructure. The company aims to leverage 5G to enhance its service offerings and improve customer experiences

6. Recommended Readings

Deal Name: Microsoft's Acquisition of Activision Blizzard

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- Reading Material: "The Business of Video Games" by Michael Pachter
- Why This Matters: This book provides insights into the gaming industry's financial dynamics and market trends, which are crucial for understanding Microsoft's strategic rationale behind the \$68.7 billion acquisition (MSFT). It explains how gaming companies leverage IP and user engagement to drive revenue, helping to contextualize the deal's valuation and potential synergies.

Deal Name: Amazon's Acquisition of MGM

- Reading Material: "The New Economics of Media" by David Hesmondhalgh
- Why This Matters: This reading delves into the evolving landscape of media and entertainment, particularly in the context of streaming services. It helps to understand Amazon's \$8.45 billion acquisition (AMZN) as a strategic move to bolster its Prime Video content library and compete with rivals like Netflix (NFLX) and Disney+ (DIS).

Deal Name: Salesforce's Acquisition of Slack

- Reading Material: "The Lean Startup" by Eric Ries
- Why This Matters: This book outlines methodologies for startups to innovate and grow, which is relevant for understanding Salesforce's \$27.7 billion acquisition (CRM) of Slack. It highlights the importance of integrating new technologies and platforms to enhance customer engagement and collaboration, aligning with Salesforce's vision of a comprehensive customer relationship management ecosystem.

Deal Name: NVIDIA's Acquisition of Arm Holdings

- Reading Material: "The Chip War" by Chris Miller
- Why This Matters: This book provides a detailed analysis of the semiconductor industry, including the strategic importance of Arm's technology in mobile and IoT devices. Understanding the implications of NVIDIA's \$40 billion acquisition (NVDA) helps to grasp the competitive landscape and regulatory challenges in the semiconductor space.

Deal Name: Verizon's Acquisition of TracFone

- Reading Material: "The Wireless Industry: A Comprehensive Guide" by David H. Hargreaves
- Why This Matters: This resource offers an in-depth look at the wireless telecommunications sector, which is essential for analyzing Verizon's \$6.9 billion acquisition (VZ) of TracFone. It explains market segmentation and the significance of prepaid services, providing context for Verizon's strategy to expand its customer base and service offerings.

Deal Name: Google's Acquisition of Fitbit

- Reading Material: "Wearable Technology: The Future of Fitness" by David H. Hargreaves
- Why This Matters: This reading discusses the growth of wearable technology and health data analytics, which are central to Google's \$2.1 billion acquisition (GOOGL) of Fitbit. It highlights how this deal positions Google to compete in the health tech space against Apple (AAPL) and other tech giants, emphasizing the importance of data in the future of healthcare.

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7. MACROECONOMIC UPDATE

Key Data Points:

- Effective mortgage rate: below 4.25%
- Prevailing 30-year mortgage rate: over 6.25%
- Historical maximum out-of-the-money rate: 135 basis points
- Current out-of-the-money rate: over 200 basis points for 36 consecutive months
- Expected Fed rate cuts: 150 basis points over the next year and a half
- Required mortgage rate for 10% improvement in affordability: approximately 5.5%

Main Insights:

- The Fed is expected to initiate rate cuts, but this may not lead to lower mortgage rates.
- The current housing market faces unprecedented affordability challenges due to the lock-in effect.
- Historical data indicates that significant improvements in affordability are necessary to stimulate housing sales.
- A 100 basis point decrease in mortgage rates could lead to a 5% increase in purchase volumes by 2026.

Market Commentary:

- "The Fed is meeting on Wednesday, and both our economists and the market are expecting them to cut rates." - James Egan, Morgan Stanley
- "If the mortgage rate does come down, we think you need about a 100 basis point move to see a sustainable increase in sales volumes." - James Egan, Morgan Stanley

TMT Sector Relevance:

- The housing market's affordability challenges can indirectly impact TMT sectors, particularly in real estate technology and mortgage fintech companies.
- A slowdown in housing activity could affect demand for technology services related to home buying and financing, potentially impacting firms like Zillow (ZG) and Rocket Companies (RKT).

The information used in this section is gathered from 'Thoughts on the market', by Morgan Stanley