

1 Year Chart



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Next Fifteen Communications Group PLC is a research client of Radnor Capital Partners Ltd.

MIFID II – this research is deemed to be a minor, non-monetary benefit.

Next Fifteen's H1 results have provided more colour on the strong financial performance indicated in the recent trading update. All the group segments are delivering strong YoY organic growth, bolstered by recent acquisitions. The performance of the Delivery segment continues to be eye-catching, especially in terms of margin. As previously flagged, the structural margin gains from property and post pandemic cost efficiencies have now been fully captured with the group now re-investing back into headcount and capacity. Given the strength of current trading, we have upgraded our FY22 expectations by a further 3% although we do not see further margin gains until FY23.

Productisation is a growing theme for Next Fifteen as it looks to break clear of the margin constraints typically associated with agency business models. C.40% of group revenue is already derived outside of "time and materials" and delivers a materially higher margin. The pathway to the group generating EBITA margins in excess of 25% is becoming clearer and will be driven by a combination of internal investment, M&A and current revenue growth trends being maintained.

Next Fifteen currently trades on a FY23E PE of 20.7x which, despite the strong recent run, still represents a material discount to a number of peers. Given the strength of delivery and the medium-term outlook, this discount continues to feel anomalous.

- **Strong headlines:** Headline revenue growth +32% (organic +23%) driving +69% growth in PBT. Adjusted EPS +51% post increased minorities charge. Net cash of £6.6m.
- **Productisation likely to be a growing theme:** Although not new news, the emphasis on productisation has definitely grown in prominence. This is likely to be more impactful in the Delivery, Transformation and Insight segments. In the short term, NFC is likely to be a net investor (£1m - £2m of incremental internal spend) and have indicated that FY23 is likely to be first year where the revenue and margin benefits are likely to be felt in a material sense.
- **Margin progression to be driven primarily by revenue mix:** The outlook for margins remains positive for NFC, although the main driver of future margin expansion is likely to be the mix effect of higher margin businesses growing faster than the group average. The immediate property costs savings (which are structural) have now been secured and staff costs are now likely to grow as the group reinvests to secure strong levels of client demand.
- **Estimate upgrades:** We are upgrading our revenue and adjusted PBT estimates for FY22 by +3% respectively and FY23 by +3% / +7% respectively. An increased minorities charge drops through to a +2% EPS upgrade for FY22.

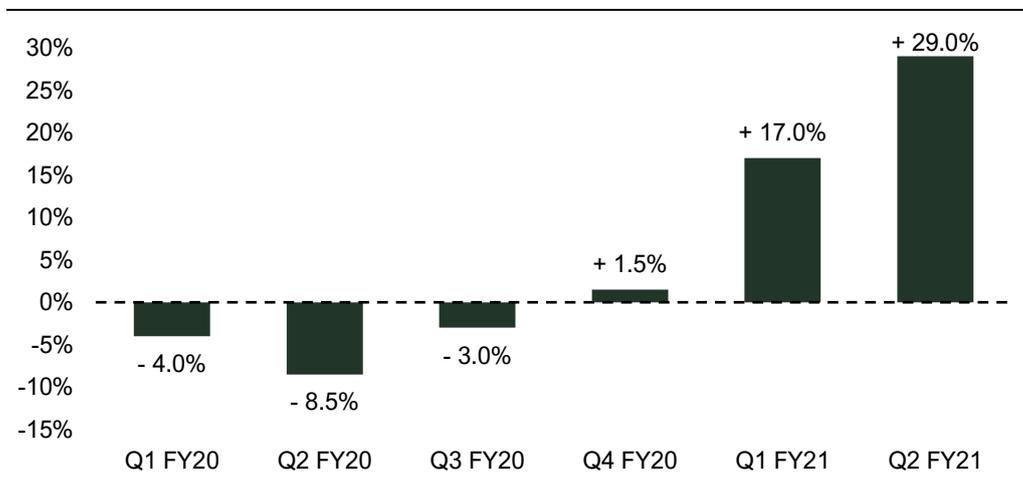
Y/E January, £m	Sales	PBT adj	EPS (p)	Div (p)	Net Cash	Fiscal PER x	Yield %
FY 2020A	248.5	40.2	34.8	2.5	-9.4	31.6	0.2
FY 2021A	266.9	49.1	40.7	7.0	14.0	27.0	0.6
FY 2022E	339.5	67.1	50.2	10.5	25.3	21.9	1.0
FY 2023E	365.2	74.5	54.3	12.1	55.2	20.2	1.1
FY 2024E	391.0	81.5	59.2	13.2	101.2	18.6	1.2

Source: Radnor Capital Partners

Organic growth has moved beyond recovery

In Figure 1 below, we show the quarterly progression of organic revenue growth by quarter through the course of FY'21 and into FY'22.

Figure 1: Quarterly organic revenue growth through FY'21



Source: Company, Radnor

It is now clear that NFC has moved beyond recovering the ground lost due to Covid. Anecdotal evidence from other companies in the sector (listed and private) confirms the strength of the current spending environment. If we look back to our pre-Covid FY22e revenue estimate, we had been looking for £281m of revenue. If we adjust this for the acquisitions of Shopper Media and Mach49 in the intervening period (c.£20m of acquired revenue), our current FY22e revenue estimate of £339.4m is now c.13% ahead.

The other interesting comparison with pre Covid estimates is at the margin line. Again, if we look back at our last pre-Covid estimate for FY22e, we had been looking for EBITA margins (pre-central overhead) of 22.3%, some 240 basis points below our latest estimate of 24.4%. According to our internal calculations, acquisitions represent c.50 basis points of this improvement with the combination of property cost savings and net revenue drop through accounting for the balance.

Figure 2: H1 results by segment

Customer Insight		Customer Engagement		Customer Delivery		Business Transformation	
<i>Analytics, data and research led. Enabling clients to make better marketing & product decisions</i>		<i>Content, strategy and message creation and delivery.</i>		<i>Sales delivery through the application of technology and data</i>		<i>Organisational value maximisation through investment and transformation</i>	
H1 22 Revenue	£18.8m	H1 22 Revenue	£91.2m	H1 22 Revenue	£36.3m	H1 22 Revenue	£19.7m
H1 22 EBITA	£3.3m	H1 22 EBITA	£20.4m	H1 22 EBITA	£13.2m	H1 22 EBITA	£4.6m
Margin	17.7%	Margin	22.3%	Margin	36.3%	Margin	23.4%
Organic growth	+23%	Organic growth	+15%	Organic growth	+49%	Organic growth	+47%

Source: Company

Key highlights from the H1 results are as follows:

- Headline H1 revenue growth +32% YoY to £165.9m;
- Organic H1 revenue growth +23% YoY, of which Q1 organic growth was +17% and Q2 +29%. All four of the group's segments reported healthy organic growth;
- Pre-central cost contribution margin came in at 25.0%, +440 basis points vs H1 FY21. Post central cost EBITA margin (the group's headline measure) came in at 21.1%, +430 basis points over FY21;
- Adjusted PBT (post IFRS16 lease liabilities) +69% YoY to £35.0m;
- Adjusted EPS of 26.3p, +51% YoY;
- Interim dividend of 3.6p (FY21: nil);
- Net cash of £6.6m (H1 FY21 net debt of £6.6m).

Key highlights at the segment level:

- **Customer Engagement:** This is the largest segment in the group and is where the core of the group's more established comms agencies can be found. The key stories here have been the steady recovery of the large Archetype agency in the US (itself the result of a previous internal agency merger in FY19) and a very strong performance from the MBooth agency, which includes the healthcare business acquired in FY21. Organic YoY revenue growth came in at +15%, with reported revenue growth YoY +10.2% to £91.2m and EBIT contribution of £20.4m (H1 FY21: £16.4m). EBIT margins grew +250 basis points to 22.3%.
- **Customer Insight:** This segment had been the most impacted by the initial pandemic impact as consumer facing marketing budgets came under short term pressure. However, since the start of FY22 Insight has seen a steady recovery. The core brand is Savanta, which made a couple of small North American acquisition during the period. Headline YoY revenue growth was +22% to £18.8m, (organic growth of +23%). Segment margins are still recovering and showed the largest YoY growth in the group, +710 basis points to 17.7%. Historically, margins from this area of the group have trended in the mid 20% range.
- **Customer Delivery:** This segment has been the most consistent performer through the pandemic with its core focus on direct revenue and lead generation. Agencies such as Activate, Twogether and Agent 3 have been some of the strongest performers across the group. The most recent larger acquisition, Shopper Media Group, with its data driven approach to point of sales optimisation, falls into this segment. Segment headline YoY revenue growth was +60% to £36.3m (H1 FY21: £22.6m) with organic revenue growth +49%. Segment contribution margin was +660 basis points YoY to 36.3%, the highest overall margins in the group.
- **Business Transformation:** The organic revenue performance was driven primarily by a very strong performance from Blueshirt, which leveraged off a very strong US tech IPO environment and Palladium, which offers digital advisory services into the private equity space. Mach49, acquired in August 2020 and is focused more into the corporate venturing and strategic value consultancy space, also

performed strongly, driving a near quadrupling of reported segment revenue to £19.7m (H1 FY21: £5.5m) and EBIT contribution of £4.6m (H1 FY21: £1.3m).

- **M&A** remains a key growth driver for Next Fifteen, with the company sticking to its tried and tested M&A model which is based around backing entrepreneurial management teams who are looking to de-risk their next stage of growth. Despite the headlines being dominated by PE and VC led deals at hugely inflated multiples, Next Fifteen has maintained its valuation discipline (especially around initial consideration multiples). In our view, Next Fifteen has one of the better articulated M&A models which has gone a long way to delivering material growth benefits at a lower level of valuation risk than has often been the case elsewhere in the sector.

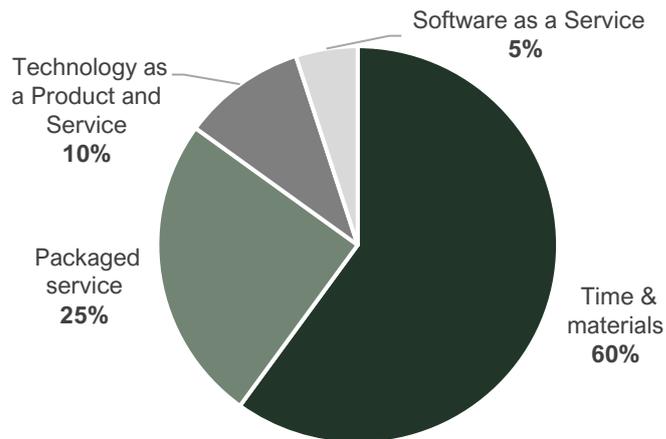
Alongside some small bolt-on acquisitions made by Savanta (Insight segment) the most notable recent acquisitions have been:

- **Shopper Media Group** - acquired in April 2021 for an initial consideration of £15.7m and a five year earn out structure (realistic total value of c.£40m) and a look through multiple of 8x EBIT. SMG is a data driven retail sales agency that sits within the Delivery segment.
 - **BCA** – Here Next Fifteen acquired a 31% controlling interest (on top of the 20% already owned) in a business formed in 2016 by the Blueshirt investor relations agency. BCA is focused primarily on advising on IPOs (technology and SPACs) and has been performing strongly (2020 revenue of \$4.1m with EBIT margins in excess of 60%). Next Fifteen had reported BCA as an associate historically but will now fully consolidate the venture alongside a 49% minority interest. Next Fifteen has the right to acquire a further 29% in two years' time, taking the ownership position to 80%.
- **Productisation is a growing theme.** Although the potential of “productisation” has been well flagged by Next Fifteen in the past, there is a clear and growing emphasis on this as a new and material route to growth for the group.

Historically, the majority of group revenue has been generated from traditional consultancy and advisory services. Although subject to a high degree of variation across the group's businesses, fundamentally these revenues were representative of time and capacity utilisation with a natural limit on their scalability. This also created a more direct and linear link between capacity and margin potential. Traditional agency economics suggest that a delivering a contribution margin consistently in excess of 25% is challenging to maintain for a “time and materials” business model.

Over the last five years, a number of the business acquired by Next Fifteen have displayed margins materially in excess of 25% and have also been able to deliver growth rates well in excess of the group average. These businesses have been able to do so primarily through the application of technology as part of the client solution but also through pricing as a function of client outcome rather than cost input.

Next Fifteen has provided more colour around the current revenue mix by revenue type as opposed to geography and client application. This segmentation is not part of the group's formal financial reporting.

Figure 3: Next Fifteen revenue mix by type

Source: Company, Radnor

We can see from Figure 3 that c.60% of Next Fifteen's revenue is derived from traditional agency services with the remaining 40% coming from more productised elements.

- Packaged services are where technology sits at the heart of the offering but where the service, or informational outcome, is sold on a discrete or project basis. Our understanding is that the Insight segment and elements of the Engagement and Delivery segment sit within this bucket.
- Technology as a Product and Service is a more interesting area where subscription / licence models dominate and where pricing is more determined by the value to the client rather than the cost to deliver. Next Fifteen's Delivery segment and elements of Business Transformation are most exposed to this revenue type.

Next Fifteen are clear in their expectation that it is in the Packaged Services and Technology as a Product and Service where the most attractive routes to growth lie. Although it is unrealistic to expect the Engagement segment (dominated by the more traditional communications agencies) to fully shift away from the time and materials model, management are clearly focused on exploring newer service and delivery models here.

So what does all this mean and why should investors care? Margins, put simply. History shows that it is difficult to sustain time and material margins in excess of 25% without running the risk of becoming underinvested or seeing higher employee churn. Margins in the Engagement segment are currently 22.3% and we anticipate incremental improvements from this point onwards, however we do not see margins expanding beyond 23.5% over the medium term. In the absence of material margin expansion, earnings growth will then become solely a function of organic revenue growth (high single digit percentage) and M&A contribution.

However, margins elsewhere in the group are materially higher, especially with the Delivery segment (36%) where the highest level of productisation currently resides. The Insight segment historically has delivered margins well in excess of 25% and is an area where investment in further productisation is being focused (ie roll out of the BrandVue service).

Next Fifteen margins are therefore likely to be driven by the evolving product mix. If current growth trends between the segments are maintained and if meaningful further progress is made in developing internal Packaged Service and Technology as a Product offerings then a medium term (post central costs) group EBIT margin of c.25% (currently 21.1%) should be achievable.

Estimate Revisions: PBT +3% for FY 2022, +7% for FY 2023

We have revisited our forecast model and have made the following changes:

Figure 4: Radnor estimate revisions

£m	FY21A	Previous		New		Change, %	
		2022E	2023E	2022E	2023E	2022E	2023E
Customer Engagement	166.5	199.8	211.8	186.5	197.7		
Customer Delivery	49.6	61.9	68.1	74.3	81.8		
Customer Insight	33.1	41.3	44.6	39.7	42.9		
Business Transformation	17.7	26.6	29.2	39.0	42.9		
Revenue	266.9	329.7	353.9	339.5	365.2	+ 3%	+ 3%
Customer Engagement	36.9	46.6	49.6	41.0	45.5		
Customer Delivery	15.2	19.8	21.9	26.0	28.9		
Customer Insight	4.9	7.0	7.7	6.7	7.4		
Business Transformation	3.9	6.1	6.7	9.0	9.9		
Central Overhead	-11.4	-14.0	-15.6	-15.3	-16.4	+ 9%	+ 5%
EBITA	49.5	65.5	70.3	67.5	75.1	+ 3%	+ 7%
- margin %	18.5%	19.9%	19.9%	19.9%	20.6%		
Adj. PBT	49.1	65.1	69.8	67.1	74.5	+ 3%	+ 7%
Adj. EPS (p)	40.7	49.2	52.2	50.2	54.3	+ 2%	+ 4%

Source: Radnor

We have updated our segmental forecasts to reflect the strong performance from Delivery and Business Transformation.

We have also reflected the commentary around internal product development investment (c.£1m to £2m per annum) and also broader cost re-investment around headcount. Unlike earlier upgrades this year, we are not increasing our FY22 margin expectations at this stage. Our FY23 margin expectations have been upgraded due primarily to favourable revenue mix changes and initial contributions from internal development spend this year.

Valuation

Figure 5: Next Fifteen FY2 PE

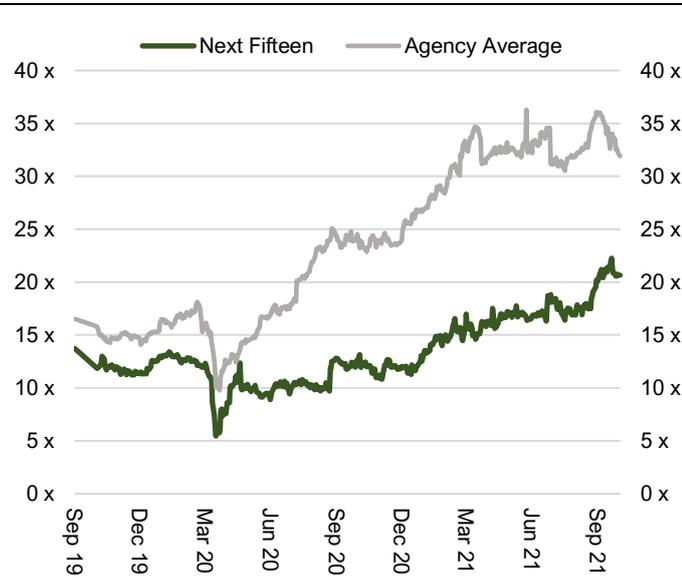
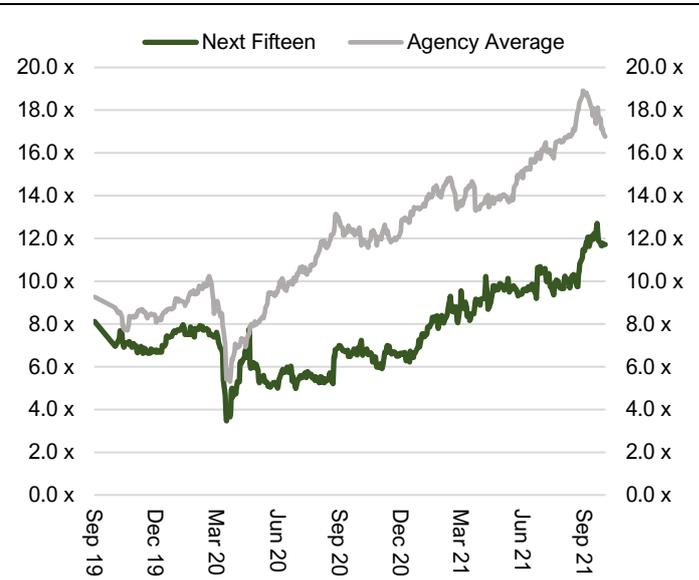


Figure 6: Next Fifteen FY2 EV/EBITDA



Source: FactSet, Radnor

In Figures 5 & 6 above, we show the evolution of the Next Fifteen FY2 PE and EV/EBITDA multiple over the last two years, compared to the Small Cap Agency average. We focus on FY2 earnings as short-term earnings volatility is clearly pronounced in the current year and we believe investors have now moved beyond their initial focus on near term security and are looking through to the 2022 earnings outlook.

In Figures 7 and 8 below, we compare Next Fifteen to the peer group and Small Cap Media average in terms of PE vs Revenue Growth and PE vs EBITDA margins. On both measures we can see that Next Fifteen sits well ahead of the peer group averages in terms of both growth and margin, yet still does not command the premium multiples shown by a number of peers.

Figure 7: Next Fifteen FY2 PE vs Growth

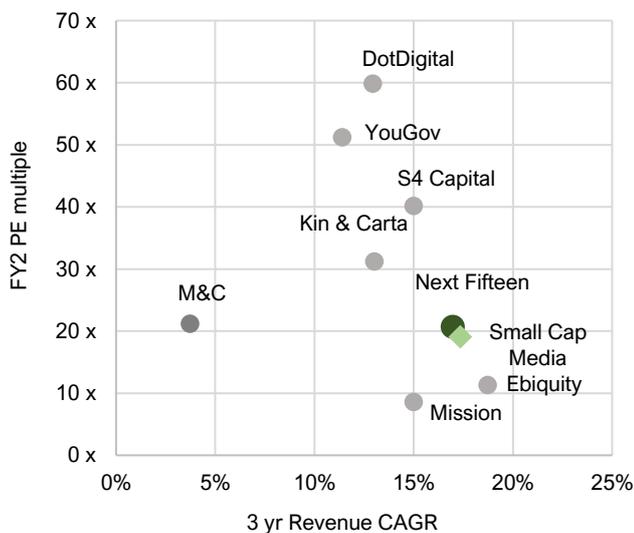
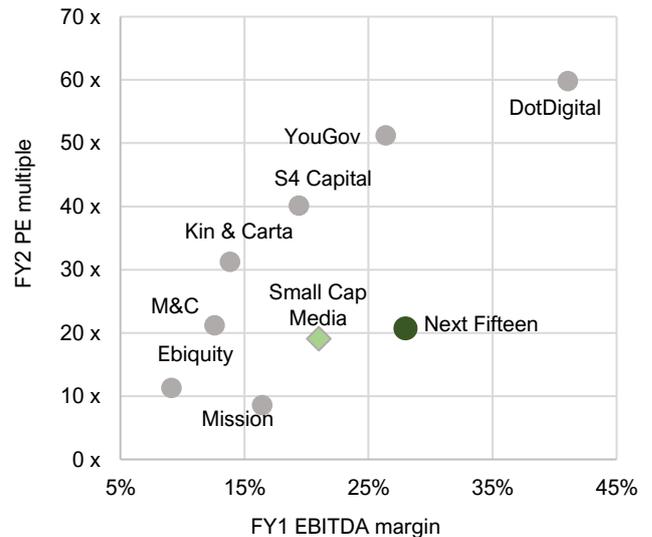


Figure 8: Next Fifteen FY2 PE vs Margin



Source: FactSet, Radnor

Next Fifteen Communications PLC

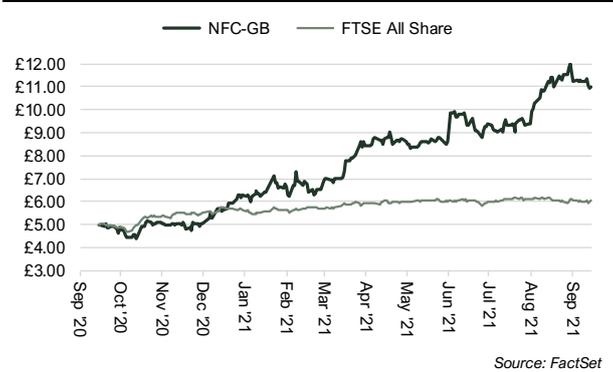
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Price (p): 1100 p
Market Cap: 1,021 m
EV: 1,007 m

PROFIT & LOSS

Year to 31 January, £m	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22e	FY23e	FY24e
Customer Engagement				166.5	186.5	197.7	207.6
Customer Delivery				49.6	74.3	81.8	89.9
Customer Insight				33.1	39.7	42.9	46.3
Business Transformation				17.7	39.0	42.9	47.2
Group Net Revenue	196.8	224.1	248.5	266.9	339.5	365.2	391.0
Customer Engagement				36.9	41.0	45.5	48.8
Customer Delivery				15.2	26.0	28.9	31.9
Customer Insight				4.9	6.7	7.4	8.1
Business Transformation				3.9	9.0	9.9	10.9
Head Office	(8.9)	(9.3)	(9.5)	(11.4)	(15.3)	(16.4)	(17.6)
EBITA - Adjusted	30.0	37.0	40.9	49.5	67.5	75.1	82.1
Associates & JV's	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.2	-	-
Net Bank Interest	(0.7)	(1.0)	(0.8)	(0.8)	(0.6)	(0.6)	(0.6)
PBT - Adjusted	32.8	36.0	40.2	49.1	67.1	74.5	81.5
Non Operating Items	(12.8)	(16.3)	(23.0)	(37.2)	(29.6)	(26.0)	(22.8)
Other Financial Items	(3.2)	(0.9)	(11.6)	(13.2)	(16.5)	(10.0)	(10.0)
PBT - IFRS	13.3	18.8	5.6	(1.3)	19.9	37.5	47.6
Tax	(4.0)	(4.3)	(2.7)	(2.6)	(4.1)	(9.4)	(11.9)
Tax - Adjusted	(5.9)	(7.2)	(8.0)	(9.9)	(15.8)	(17.9)	(19.6)
Tax rate - Adjusted	17.9%	20.0%	20.0%	20.2%	23.5%	24.0%	24.0%
Minority interests	0.7	0.6	0.6	1.0	2.9	4.2	4.8
No. shares m	74.3	79.2	85.3	89.4	92.0	92.0	92.0
No. shares m, diluted	82.1	85.0	90.9	93.8	96.4	96.4	96.4
IFRS EPS (p)	11.6	17.5	2.7	(5.5)	14.1	25.9	33.6
Adj EPS (p), diluted	32.1	33.1	34.8	40.7	50.2	54.3	59.2
Total DPS (p)	6.3	7.6	2.5	7.0	10.5	12.1	13.2

PRICE CHART - 1 YEAR ABSOLUTE vs FTSE ALL SHARE



SHAREHOLDERS

	% of ord. Share capital
Liontrust Investment Partners	14.1%
Octopus Investments	14.1%
Aviva Investors	11.8%
Aberdeen Stan Life	7.9%
Tim Dyson (CEO)	5.9%
BlackRock	5.1%
Canaccord Wealth	5.0%
Herald Inv Mgmt	4.4%
	68.3%

CASH FLOW

Year to 31 January, £m	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22e	FY23e	FY24e
Net Profit: (add back)	9.3	14.5	2.8	(3.9)	15.8	28.1	35.7
Depreciation & Amortisation	11.4	13.8	26.4	28.0	27.6	27.8	28.1
Net Finance costs	4.0	1.9	14.1	15.4	18.2	11.7	11.7
Tax	4.0	4.3	2.7	2.6	4.1	9.4	11.9
Working Capital	(4.2)	1.2	(3.3)	6.6	(6.3)	(4.5)	(0.8)
Other	4.4	2.6	6.8	24.3	8.8	9.0	9.0
Cash from Ops	28.9	38.4	49.5	72.9	68.2	81.5	95.6
Cash Tax	(4.3)	(6.2)	(6.0)	(8.4)	(10.0)	(9.4)	(11.9)
Tangible Capex	(3.0)	(5.6)	(3.5)	(2.0)	(3.0)	(3.0)	(3.0)
Intangible Capex	(1.2)	(2.4)	(1.8)	(2.1)	(2.0)	(2.0)	(2.0)
Free Cashflow	20.4	24.1	38.2	60.4	53.2	67.2	78.7
Dividends	(5.7)	(6.6)	(7.5)	(0.7)	(7.3)	(10.6)	(12.1)
Acquisitions & Inv.	(15.4)	(29.6)	(24.2)	(23.6)	(25.0)	(17.0)	(11.0)
Financing	3.8	7.7	1.8	(37.7)	(9.7)	(9.7)	(9.7)
Net Cashflow	3.1	(4.4)	8.3	(1.6)	11.3	29.9	46.0
Net Cash (Debt)	(11.6)	(5.2)	(9.4)	14.0	25.3	55.2	101.2

BALANCE SHEET

Year to 31 January, £m	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22e	FY23e	FY24e
Intangibles	94.8	126.1	155.4	163.8	175.8	179.8	177.8
P,P+E	13.6	15.9	14.2	8.9	12.3	10.4	8.3
Tax Asset & Other	11.7	13.0	54.7	43.4	35.4	27.4	19.4
Total Fixed Assets	120.1	155.0	224.4	216.1	223.4	217.6	205.5
Net Working Capital	(32.2)	(38.4)	(102.3)	(113.2)	(112.5)	(89.6)	(88.9)
Capital Employed	87.9	116.6	122.1	102.9	110.9	128.0	116.7
Net Funds	(11.6)	(5.2)	(9.4)	14.0	25.3	55.2	101.2
Net Assets	76.3	111.5	112.7	116.9	136.2	183.2	217.8

Announcements

Date	Event
September 2021	H1 results
August 2021	Trading update
April 2021	Final results (y/e Jan 2021)
April 2021	Acquisition of Shopper Media for £15m
January 2021	Trading update
September 2020	Trading update
September 2020	Acquisition of Mach49 for \$2.7m

RATIOS

	FY20	FY21	FY22e	FY23e	FY24e
RoE	28.1%	32.7%	35.6%	28.6%	26.2%
RoCE	33.6%	48.5%	61.0%	58.7%	70.3%
Asset Turnover (x)	0.9x	0.8x	0.7x	0.6x	0.5x
NWC % Revenue	41.2%	42.4%	33.1%	24.5%	22.7%
Op Cash % EBITA	121.2%	147.4%	101.1%	108.5%	116.5%
Net Debt / EBITDA	0.1x	-	-	-	-

VALUATION

Fiscal	FY20	FY21	FY22e	FY23e	FY24e
P/E	31.6x	27.0x	21.9x	20.2x	18.6x
EV/EBITDA	14.7x	13.0x	14.9x	13.4x	12.3x
Div Yield	0.2%	0.6%	1.0%	1.1%	1.2%
FCF Yield	3.8%	6.0%	5.3%	6.7%	7.8%
EPS growth	4.9%	17.1%	23.3%	8.2%	9.0%
DPS growth	-66.9%	180.0%	49.5%	15.4%	9.0%

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