



Fastenal Company (FAST)

Updated January 19th, 2024, by Aristofanis Papadatos

Key Metrics

Current Price:	\$68	5 Year CAGR Estimate:	3.8%	Market Cap:	\$36 B
Fair Value Price:	\$52	5 Year Growth Estimate:	7.0%	Ex-Dividend Date:	1/31/24
% Fair Value:	132%	5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:	-5.4%	Dividend Payment Date:	2/29/24
Dividend Yield:	2.3%	5 Year Price Target	\$72	Years Of Dividend Growth:	25
Dividend Risk Score:	B	Retirement Suitability Score:	C	Rating:	Hold

Overview & Current Events

Fastenal began in 1967 when Bob Kierlin and four friends pooled together \$30,000 to open the first store. The original intent was to dispense nuts and bolts via vending machine, but that idea got off the ground after 20 years. The company went public in 1987 and today provides fasteners, tools and supplies to its customers via 1,597 public branches, 1,822 active Onsite locations and over 113,000 managed inventory devices. Fastenal has a market capitalization of \$36 billion. On January 17th, 2024, Fastenal raised its quarterly dividend by 11%, from \$0.35 to \$0.39.

In mid-January, Fastenal reported (1/18/24) financial results for the fourth quarter of fiscal 2023. It grew its net sales 4% over the prior year's quarter thanks to growth in Onsite locations, mostly those that opened in the last two years, and strong sales to large customers. Earnings-per-share grew 8%, from \$0.43 to \$0.46, beating the analysts' consensus by \$0.01. Fastenal has not missed the analysts' estimates for 17 quarters in a row. The company posted record earnings-per-share in 2022 and 2023 and is likely to post another record this year, given its positive momentum and its guidance for 375-400 new Onsite locations in 2024, more than the 326 new Onsite locations achieved in 2023.

Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
EPS	\$0.84	\$0.89	\$0.87	\$1.01	\$1.31	\$1.38	\$1.49	\$1.60	\$1.89	\$2.02	\$2.15	\$3.02
DPS	\$0.50	\$0.56	\$0.60	\$0.64	\$0.77	\$0.86	\$1.00	\$1.12	\$1.24	\$1.40	\$1.56	\$2.19
Shares¹	592	579	578	575	572	574	576	578	576	573	570	570

Fastenal has grown its earnings-per-share at a 10.2% average annual rate over the last decade and at a 9.0% average annual rate over the last five years. This has been driven by a variety of factors, including sales more than doubling, an improvement in margins and tax reform. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many businesses, but Fastenal proved resilient in 2020. The traditional business faced challenges, but the Safety segment more than offset lost sales. We expect 7% growth of earnings-per-share over the next five years.

Fastenal is in the midst of a transformation from the traditional public branches leading the business to Onsite locations and managed inventory (mostly vending devices) heading the growth story. (Public store count topped out in 2014 and has since been declining, while Onsite and vending have increased materially.) We believe this is a prudent move, establishing stickier relationships with customers. This is especially true since only a small fraction of the company's business is from walk-in customers while the majority is done business-to-business.

The large, national accounts are tougher for margins, but this is offset by incremental volume. Moreover, the company is exposed to a fair amount of cyclical, as over half of its business is in construction and heavy manufacturing.

Valuation Analysis

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Now	2029
Avg. P/E	27.9	23.2	25.3	23.3	20.8	23.6	28.0	35.6	27.6	27.5	31.6	24.0
Avg. Yld.	2.1%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%	2.6%	2.4%	2.1%	2.4%	2.5%	2.3%	3.0%

¹ In millions.

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Over the past decade, shares of Fastenal have traded hands with an average price-to-earnings ratio of 26.3. Even during the depths of the Great Recession, shares did not trade below 15 times earnings. The stock has rarely traded with a price-to-earnings ratio below 20 since 2010. Overall, Fastenal has always traded at a premium valuation.

This premium has implications on the shareholder return side, as the dividend yield will remain average (even with an elevated payout ratio) and share buybacks do not enhance shareholder value. (The last time a meaningful number of shares was retired was in 2015, when the company took on debt). Assuming a fair price-to-earnings ratio of 24.0 for 2029, the stock is likely to incur a -5.4% annualized valuation drag over the next five years.

Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
Payout	60%	63%	69%	63%	59%	62%	67%	70%	66%	69%	73%	73%

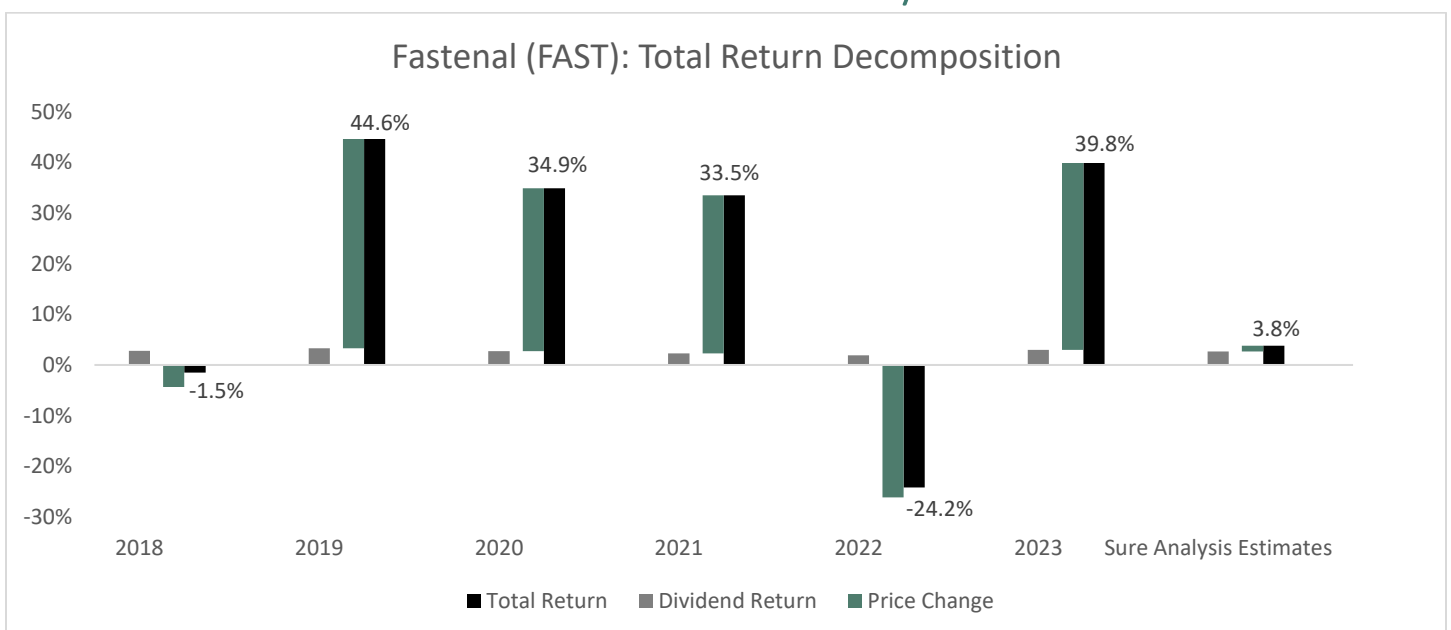
Fastenal has a first mover competitive advantage in its industrial vending and Onsite locations, creating a very sticky and well-attuned customer relationship with high switching costs. Moreover, its scale allows the company to continue its growth path, adjust to business preferences and reliably deliver needed goods.

During the Great Recession, Fastenal reported earnings-per-share of \$0.39, \$0.48, \$0.31, and \$0.45 for the 2007 through 2010 period. Moreover, the dividend kept rising during that period. While we note some cyclical possibilities in the construction industry, thus far the company has proven itself to be well prepared to endure financial storms. We note that the dividend payout ratio is elevated, but we believe this is reasonable considering the debt-free balance sheet. Indeed, Fastenal actually paid a special dividend in 2020 and 2023, citing high cash balances and a favorable outlook.

Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Fastenal has proven a great company, with consistent growth of earnings and dividends. Moreover, it is executing moves to better cement itself as a go-to supplier. It's the sort of business that you would be proud to own. However, the stock has rallied 44% in the last 12 months and thus it has become fully valued. We expect the stock to offer a 3.8% average annual total return over the next five years thanks to 7.0% earnings growth and a 2.3% dividend, partly offset by a -5.4% valuation headwind. The stock maintains its hold rating.

Total Return Breakdown by Year



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Income Statement Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Revenue	3734	3869	3962	4391	4965	5334	5647	6011	6980	7347
Gross Profit	1897	1949	1965	2164	2399	2515	2568	2777	3216	3355
Gross Margin	50.8%	50.4%	49.6%	49.3%	48.3%	47.2%	45.5%	46.2%	46.1%	45.7%
SG&A Exp.	1111	1122	1170	1283	1400	1459	1427	1560	1762	---
D&A Exp.	73	87	104	127	138	149	162	171	177	177
Operating Profit	787	827	795	881	999	1056	1140	1217	1454	1529
Operating Margin	21.1%	21.4%	20.1%	20.1%	20.1%	19.8%	20.2%	20.2%	20.8%	20.8%
Net Profit	494	516	499	579	752	791	859	925	1087	1155
Net Margin	13.2%	13.3%	12.6%	13.2%	15.1%	14.8%	15.2%	15.4%	15.6%	15.7%
Free Cash Flow	310	395	330	465	498	596	934	614	767	1260
Income Tax	293	310	290	295	235	253	274	283	353	367

Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Assets	2359	2532	2669	2911	3322	3800	3965	4299	4549	4463
Cash & Equivalents	114	129	113	117	167	175	246	236	230	221
Accounts Receivable	462	468	500	608	714	742	769	900	1013	1088
Inventories	869	913	993	1093	1279	1366	1338	1524	1708	1523
Goodwill & Int. Ass.	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Total Liabilities	444	731	736	814	1019	1134	1232	1257	1385	1114
Accounts Payable	104	126	109	148	194	193	207	233	255	264
Long-Term Debt	90	365	390	415	500	345	405	390	555	260
Shareholder's Equity	1915	1801	1933	2097	2303	2666	2733	3042	3163	3349
LTD/E Ratio	0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.13	0.15	0.13	0.18	0.08

Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Return on Assets	22.3%	21.1%	19.2%	20.7%	24.1%	22.2%	22.1%	22.4%	24.6%	25.6%
Return on Equity	26.8%	27.8%	26.7%	28.7%	34.2%	31.8%	31.8%	32.0%	35.0%	35.5%
ROIC	26.2%	24.8%	22.2%	23.9%	28.3%	27.2%	27.9%	28.2%	30.4%	31.5%

Note: All figures in millions of U.S. Dollars unless per share or indicated otherwise.

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