

Rating Methodology by Sector

Electrical Machinery

1. Business base

Electrical machinery manufacturers boast a wide range of products, including such end products as consumer and industrial electronics, various parts and components, devices, and manufacturing equipment. Their business compositions are diverse, consisting of different businesses that are principal sources of income. Understanding the business risk and competitiveness of a company requires an individual analysis of the conditions of its major businesses. In general, though, the businesses of electrical machinery manufacturers are exposed to high risk, due to rapid technological innovation, volatile demand, and other factors. A rating assessment, therefore, focuses on the competitive advantage of core businesses as well as the risk control measures of the entire company.

(1) Characteristics of the industry

(i) Market overview

The products of electrical machinery manufacturers are characterized by generally high volatility in demand. The extensive ranges of products and trends create an array of factors that can affect demand. Some products are affected by domestic consumption while others depend on global demand movements. The demand for electronic components is influenced by trends in end products, and cyclical fluctuations are also evident in the demand for semiconductors and liquid crystal panels. Some products, such as semiconductor manufacturing equipment, are affected significantly by users' capital expenditure.

The speed of technological innovation and the resulting short spans of product life cycles are also among the characteristics of products in this industry.

Global demand for electrical machinery is created by such generational changes or, at times, by disruptive innovation, which tends to result in steady growth despite repeated changes.

(ii) Competitive situation

While technological advances and other factors place competitive limits on the producers of such products as semiconductor manufacturing equipment, the products of electrical machinery manufacturers are generally exposed to intense competition, both domestically and internationally. Japan not only has a number of leading manufacturers within the country, but competition with foreign players in the global market is also intensifying as products become more commoditized. Such general products exposed to intense competition are susceptible to price competition when demand declines, and, in some cases, sales are substantially reduced by falls in both the quantity sold

and prices.

The severe competitive situation also often results in corporate reorganization, such as business mergers, among companies. Reorganization not only among domestic manufacturers, but also with such foreign counterparts as other Asian manufacturers may considerably change the future competitive environment, and this should be recognized.

(iii) Cost structure

The businesses of electrical machinery manufacturers often require a large amount of funds for continuous research and development as well as capital expenditure for advanced technological development and mass production. Their cost structures, therefore, commonly consist largely of fixed costs, including depreciation. Volatile demand for products and such inflexible cost structures combine to cause a large gap between the profit and loss of electrical machinery manufacturers.

Consumer pressure for price cuts on electrical machinery manufacturers is relentless in the severe competitive environment, requiring constant cost reduction efforts, not only in a downturn, but also in an upturn in the business environment.

(2) Key factors in market position and competitiveness

(i) Market position

In assessing the creditworthiness for delivering a credit rating to electrical machinery manufacturers, JCR focuses on analyzing their core businesses' market shares, as they are considered to be a reflection of a product's competitiveness. Increasing the market share to benefit from economies of scale is an important strategy in ensuring high profitability and in covering research and development costs in such process industries as semiconductor devices and digital audiovisual equipment. Further, a large market share strengthens a company's price bargaining power, which is likely to help ease the effect of demand fluctuations.

(ii) Business portfolio

In assessing the creditworthiness for delivering a credit rating to electrical machinery manufacturers, JCR also emphasizes the analyses of companies' business portfolios. Given the large number of individual businesses exposed to high risk, JCR examines whether companywide risk control measures through, for instance, the combination of businesses in different demand areas and diversification of income sources have been taken.

Meanwhile, some large electrical machinery manufacturers have been restructuring their conventional all-inclusive business portfolios to concentrate more on areas of expertise. Such efforts are also taken into consideration.

(iii) Technological development capacity

Each company's capacity for technological development is observed in assessing the creditworthiness for delivering a credit rating to electrical machinery manufacturers. For electrical machinery manufacturers engaging in businesses in which normally rapid technological innovation takes place, product quality, functions, and other features are considered to be important in substantially differentiating their products from those of others. Because cost, as well as product performance, becomes an important differentiation factor in such businesses as semiconductor devices, the development of micromachining technologies to strengthen cost-competitiveness in advance of competitors is important.

Competitive conditions, such as technological advantages, however, are variable, due to the rapid technological innovation required. Some businesses pay continually rising research and development expenses as a result of technological sophistication. A Credit Rating is reflected companies' efforts to maintain technological advantages, such as intellectual property strategies and whether they are capable of continuous investment in research and development regardless of financial conditions.

Meanwhile, companies have been increasingly selective and selling unprofitable businesses in recent years, and whether such activities hinder the technological development needed to build new profitable business in the future will also be monitored.

(iv) Customer base

The customer base also becomes a competitive factor for such companies as electronic component manufacturers. Demand for electronic components is significantly affected by the competitiveness of end products that use the components. It is important that electronic component manufacturers, therefore, sell their products to assembled product manufacturers with competitive advantages in growth areas. JCR considers that having an adequately diversified customer base comprised largely of such assembled product manufacturers is important.

(v) Cost-competitiveness

Easier entry into such business areas as equipment manufacturing and assembly due to parts modularization in recent years has resulted in more competition and less value added available. In addition to quality and functions, cost-competitiveness becomes an important differentiation factor in such business areas. JCR considers that improving production technology, developing a production system to achieve overall optimization, and increasing competitiveness by, for instance, achieving economies of scale through business expansion are important.

Improving cost-competitiveness is important also for electronic component manufacturers. A key criterion is whether a company is capable of absorbing profit-reducing factors, such as the constant pressure to cut selling prices and the rising costs of raw materials, by controlling other costs and expenses. JCR examines such measures as the overseas relocation of production, improved material

efficiency, and the development and commercialization of new materials that are resilient to the effect of an increase in the costs of raw materials.

(vi) Management

For businesses that require continuous capital expenditure and investment in research and development, such as semiconductor devices, the timing and size of the investment have a considerable effect on the subsequent business. Management decision making, therefore, is considered a very important criterion. JCR analyzes whether the system allows managers with expertise in the business to make timely and prompt decisions.

2. Financial base

(1) Earnings strength

In general, the businesses of electrical machinery manufacturers are largely influenced by demand fluctuations, where maintaining stable earnings is relatively difficult. Consequently, assessment of their earnings strength is based primarily on an analysis of trends in the averages of earnings capacity through both high- and low-demand periods in addition to the levels of each year. Maintaining profit at a certain level even during low-demand periods is essential. A sharp decline in earnings during a recession resulting in a net loss would have an adverse effect on finance, which, therefore, is considered a significant negative factor in a credit rating even if it occurs in a single fiscal year.

More specifically, operating income and the ratio of operating income to net sales are emphasized as indicators of comprehensive earning power reflecting the total competitive advantage of a product. Since continuous capital expenditure is incurred in many of the businesses, JCR also observes the return on assets to determine whether the earnings are adequate for the investment.

Key financial indicators:

- Operating income
- Operating margin
- Return on assets

(2) Cash flow

JCR evaluates the companies' ability to generate cash flow that provides funds for investment and repayment of interest-bearing debt. It also monitors whether stable cash flow is maintained regardless of financial conditions by reducing production lead times, improving asset efficiency, such as controlling accounts receivable and inventories, and making other efforts.

Large investment is needed in many of the businesses of electrical machinery manufacturers, such as semiconductor devices and digital home appliances. To determine whether the interest-bearing debt associated with investment is adding an excessive burden or if the companies have the capacity to continue constant investment going forward, EBITDA and the balance between cash flow from

operating activities and interest-bearing debt are examined in the rating assessment.

Key financial indicators:

- Cash flow from operating activities
- Free cash flow
- EBITDA
- Ratio of interest-bearing debt to cash flow from operating activities
- Ratio of interest-bearing debt to EBITDA

(3) Safety

Normally, electrical machinery manufacturers experiencing large fluctuations in the demand for products and/or in product prices as well as high income volatility will require higher levels of financial stability than companies whose businesses maintain stable earnings.

Some businesses face an increasing burden of investment in research and development and capital expenditure, and maintaining a superior financial structure and the capacity for flexible procurement of external funds is important in view of durability against that burden.

A rating assessment focuses on the amount of equity capital as a risk buffer, equity ratio, debts equity ratio, and other indicators of financial stability.

Key financial indicators:

- Shareholders' equity
- Equity ratio
- Debt equity ratio

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