

[Code of Federal Regulations]
[Title 26, Volume 6]
[Revised as of April 1, 2003]
From the U.S. Government Printing Office via GPO Access
[CITE: 26CFR1.482-5]

[Page 594-601]

TITLE 26--INTERNAL REVENUE

CHAPTER I--INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
(CONTINUED)

PART 1--INCOME TAXES--Table of Contents

Sec. 1.482-5 Comparable profits method.

(a) In general. The comparable profits method evaluates whether the amount charged in a controlled transaction is arm's length based on objective measures of profitability (profit level indicators) derived from uncontrolled taxpayers that engage in similar business activities under similar circumstances.

(b) Determination of arm's length result--(1) In general. Under the comparable profits method, the determination of an arm's length result is based on the amount of operating profit that the tested party would have earned on related party transactions if its profit level indicator were equal to that of an uncontrolled comparable (comparable operating profit). Comparable operating profit is calculated by determining a profit level indicator for an uncontrolled comparable, and applying the profit level indicator to the financial data related to the tested party's most narrowly identifiable business activity for which data incorporating the controlled transaction is available (relevant business activity). To the extent possible, profit level indicators should be applied solely to the tested party's financial data that is related to controlled transactions. The tested party's reported operating profit is compared to the comparable operating profits derived from the profit level indicators of uncontrolled comparables to determine whether the reported operating profit represents an arm's length result.

[[Page 595]]

(2) Tested party--(i) In general. For purposes of this section, the tested party will be the participant in the controlled transaction whose operating profit attributable to the controlled transactions can be verified using the most reliable data and requiring the fewest and most reliable adjustments, and for which reliable data regarding uncontrolled comparables can be located. Consequently, in most cases the tested party will be the least complex of the controlled taxpayers and will not own valuable intangible property or unique assets that distinguish it from potential uncontrolled comparables.

(ii) Adjustments for tested party. The tested party's operating profit must first be adjusted to reflect all other allocations under section 482, other than adjustments pursuant to this section.

(3) Arm's length range. See Sec. 1.482-1(e)(2) for the determination of the arm's length range. For purposes of the comparable profits method, the arm's length range will be established using comparable operating profits derived from a single profit level indicator.

(4) Profit level indicators. Profit level indicators are ratios that measure relationships between profits and costs incurred or resources employed. A variety of profit level indicators can be calculated in any given case. Whether use of a particular profit level indicator is appropriate depends upon a number of factors, including the nature of the activities of the tested party, the reliability of the available data with respect to uncontrolled comparables, and the extent to which the profit level indicator is likely to produce a reliable measure of the income that the tested party would have earned had it dealt with controlled taxpayers at arm's length, taking into account all of the facts and circumstances. The profit level indicators should be derived from a sufficient number of years of data to reasonably measure returns that accrue to uncontrolled comparables. Generally, such a period should encompass at least the taxable year under review and the preceding two taxable years. This analysis must be applied in accordance with Sec. 1.482-1(f)(2)(iii)(D). Profit level indicators that may provide a reliable basis for comparing operating profits of the tested party and uncontrolled comparables include the following--

(i) Rate of return on capital employed. The rate of return on capital employed is the ratio of operating profit to operating assets. The reliability of this profit level indicator increases as operating assets play a greater role in generating operating profits for both the tested party and the uncontrolled comparable. In addition, reliability under this profit level indicator depends on the extent to which the composition of the tested party's assets is similar to that of the uncontrolled comparable. Finally, difficulties in properly valuing operating assets will diminish the reliability of this profit level indicator.

(ii) Financial ratios. Financial ratios measure relationships between profit and costs or sales revenue. Since functional differences generally have a greater effect on the relationship between profit and costs or sales revenue than the relationship between profit and operating assets, financial ratios are more sensitive to functional differences than the rate of return on capital employed. Therefore, closer functional comparability normally is required under a financial ratio than under the rate of return on capital employed to achieve a similarly reliable measure of an arm's length result. Financial ratios that may be appropriate include the following--

(A) Ratio of operating profit to sales; and

(B) Ratio of gross profit to operating expenses. Reliability under this profit level indicator also depends on the extent to which the composition of the tested party's operating expenses is similar to that of the uncontrolled comparables.

(iii) Other profit level indicators. Other profit level indicators not described in this paragraph (b) (4) may be used if they provide reliable measures of the income that the tested party would have earned had it dealt with controlled taxpayers at arm's length. However, profit level indicators based solely on internal data may not be used under this paragraph (b) (4) because they are not objective measures of profitability derived from operations of uncontrolled taxpayers engaged in

[[Page 596]]

similar business activities under similar circumstances.

(c) Comparability and reliability considerations--(1) In general. Whether results derived from application of this method are the most reliable measure of the arm's length result must be determined using the factors described under the best method rule in Sec. 1.482-1(c).

(2) Comparability--(i) In general. The degree of comparability between an uncontrolled taxpayer and the tested party is determined by applying the provisions of Sec. 1.482-1(d) (2). The comparable profits method compares the profitability of the tested party, measured by a profit level indicator (generally based on operating profit), to the profitability of uncontrolled taxpayers in similar circumstances. As with all methods that rely on external market benchmarks, the greater the degree of comparability between the tested party and the uncontrolled taxpayer, the more reliable will be the results derived from the application of this method. The determination of the degree of comparability between the tested party and the uncontrolled taxpayer depends upon all the relevant facts and circumstances, including the relevant lines of business, the product or service markets involved, the asset composition employed (including the nature and quantity of tangible assets, intangible assets and working capital), the size and scope of operations, and the stage in a business or product cycle.

(ii) Functional, risk and resource comparability. An operating profit represents a return for the investment of resources and assumption of risks. Therefore, although all of the factors described in Sec. 1.482-1(d) (3) must be considered, comparability under this method is particularly dependent on resources employed and risks assumed. Moreover, because resources and risks usually are directly related to functions performed, it is also important to consider functions performed in determining the degree of comparability between the tested party and an uncontrolled taxpayer. The degree of functional comparability required to obtain a reliable result under the comparable profits method, however, is generally less than that required under the resale price or cost plus methods. For example, because differences in functions performed often are reflected in operating expenses, taxpayers performing different functions may have very different gross profit margins but earn similar levels of operating profit.

(iii) Other comparability factors. Other factors listed in Sec. 1.482-1(d) (3) also may be particularly relevant under the comparable profits method. Because operating profit usually is less sensitive than gross profit to product differences, reliability under the comparable profits method is not as dependent on product similarity as the resale price or cost plus method.

However, the reliability of profitability measures based on operating profit may be adversely affected by factors that have less effect on results under the comparable uncontrolled price, resale price, and cost plus methods. For example, operating profit may be affected by varying cost structures (as reflected, for example, in the age of plant and equipment), differences in business experience (such as whether the business is in a start-up phase or is mature), or differences in management efficiency (as indicated, for example, by objective evidence such as expanding or contracting sales or executive compensation over time). Accordingly, if material differences in these factors are identified based on objective evidence, the reliability of the analysis may be affected.

(iv) Adjustments for the differences between the tested party and the uncontrolled taxpayers. If there are differences between the tested party and an uncontrolled comparable that would materially affect the profits determined under the relevant profit level indicator, adjustments should be made according to the comparability provisions of Sec. 1.482-1(d)(2). In some cases, the assets of an uncontrolled comparable may need to be adjusted to achieve greater comparability between the tested party and the uncontrolled comparable. In such cases, the uncontrolled comparable's operating income attributable to those assets must also be adjusted before computing a profit level indicator in order to reflect the income and expense attributable to the adjusted assets. In certain cases it may

[[Page 597]]

also be appropriate to adjust the operating profit of the tested party and comparable parties. For example, where there are material differences in accounts payable among the comparable parties and the tested party, it will generally be appropriate to adjust the operating profit of each party by increasing it to reflect an imputed interest charge on each party's accounts payable.

(3) Data and assumptions--(i) In general. The reliability of the results derived from the comparable profits method is affected by the quality of the data and assumptions used to apply this method.

(ii) Consistency in accounting. The degree of consistency in accounting practices between the controlled transaction and the uncontrolled comparables that materially affect operating profit affects the reliability of the result. Thus, for example, if differences in inventory and other cost accounting practices would materially affect operating profit, the ability to make reliable adjustments for such differences would affect the reliability of the results.

(iii) Allocations between the relevant business activity and other activities. The reliability of the allocation of costs, income, and assets between the relevant business activity and other activities of the tested party or an uncontrolled comparable will affect the reliability of the determination of operating profit and profit level indicators. If it is not possible to allocate costs, income, and assets directly based on factual relationships, a reasonable allocation formula may be used.

To the extent direct allocations are not made, the reliability of the results derived from the application of this method is reduced relative to the results of a method that requires fewer allocations of costs, income, and assets. Similarly, the reliability of the results derived from the application of this method is affected by the extent to which it is possible to apply the profit level indicator to the tested party's financial data that is related solely to the controlled transactions. For example, if the relevant business activity is the assembly of components purchased from both controlled and uncontrolled suppliers, it may not be possible to apply the profit level indicator solely to financial data related to the controlled transactions. In such a case, the reliability of the results derived from the application of this method will be reduced.

(d) Definitions. The definitions set forth in paragraphs (d)(1) through (6) of this section apply for purposes of this section.

(1) Sales revenue means the amount of the total receipts from sale of goods and provision of services, less returns and allowances. Accounting principles and conventions that are generally accepted in the trade or industry of the controlled taxpayer under review must be used.

(2) Gross profit means sales revenue less cost of goods sold.

(3) Operating expenses includes all expenses not included in cost of goods sold except for interest expense, foreign income taxes (as defined in Sec. 1.901-2(a)), domestic income taxes, and any other expenses not related to the operation of the relevant business activity. Operating expenses ordinarily include expenses associated with advertising, promotion, sales, marketing, warehousing and distribution, administration, and a reasonable allowance for depreciation and amortization.

(4) Operating profit means gross profit less operating expenses. Operating profit includes all income derived from the business activity being evaluated by the comparable profits method, but does not include interest and dividends, income derived from activities not being tested by this method, or extraordinary gains and losses that do not relate to the continuing operations of the tested party.

(5) Reported operating profit means the operating profit of the tested party reflected on a timely filed U.S. income tax return. If the tested party files a U.S. income tax return, its operating profit is considered reflected on a U.S. income tax return if the calculation of taxable income on its return for the taxable year takes into account the income attributable to the controlled transaction under review. If the tested party does not file a U.S. income tax

[[Page 598]]

return, its operating profit is considered reflected on a U.S. income tax return in any taxable year for which income attributable to the controlled transaction under review affects the calculation of the U.S. taxable income of any other member of the same controlled group.

If the comparable operating profit of the tested party is determined from profit level indicators derived from financial statements or other accounting records and reports of comparable parties, adjustments may be made to the reported operating profit of the tested party in order to account for material differences between the tested party's operating profit reported for U.S. income tax purposes and the tested party's operating profit for financial statement purposes. In addition, in accordance with Sec. 1.482-1(f)(2)(iii)(D), adjustments under section 482 that are finally determined may be taken into account in determining reported operating profit.

(6) Operating assets. The term operating assets means the value of all assets used in the relevant business activity of the tested party, including fixed assets and current assets (such as cash, cash equivalents, accounts receivable, and inventories).

The term does not include investments in subsidiaries, excess cash, and portfolio investments. Operating assets may be measured by their net book value or by their fair market value, provided that the same method is consistently applied to the tested party and the comparable parties, and consistently applied from year to year. In addition, it may be necessary to take into account recent acquisitions, leased assets, intangibles, currency fluctuations, and other items that may not be explicitly recorded in the financial statements of the tested party or uncontrolled comparable. Finally, operating assets must be measured by the average of the values for the beginning of the year and the end of the year, unless substantial fluctuations in the value of operating assets during the year make this an inaccurate measure of the average value over the year. In such a case, a more accurate measure of the average value of operating assets must be applied.

(e) Examples. The following examples illustrate the application of this section.

Example 1 Transfer of tangible property resulting in no adjustment.

(i) FP is a publicly traded foreign corporation with a U.S. subsidiary, USSub, that is under audit for its 1996 taxable year. FP manufactures a consumer product for worldwide distribution. USSub imports the assembled product and distributes it within the United States at the wholesale level under the FP name.

(ii) FP does not allow uncontrolled taxpayers to distribute the product. Similar products are produced by other companies but none of them is sold to uncontrolled taxpayers or to uncontrolled distributors.

(iii) Based on all the facts and circumstances, the district director determines that the comparable profits method will provide the most reliable measure of an arm's length result. USSub is selected as the tested party because it engages in activities that are less complex than those undertaken by FP.

There is data from a number of independent operators of wholesale distribution businesses. These potential comparables are further narrowed to select companies in the same industry segment that perform similar functions and bear similar risks to USSub.

An analysis of the information available on these taxpayers shows that the ratio of operating profit to sales is the most appropriate profit level indicator, and this ratio is relatively stable where at least three years are included in the average. For the taxable years 1994 through 1996, USSub shows the following results:

1995	1996	Average	1994
Sales.....			
\$500,000	\$560,000	\$500,000	\$520,000
Cost of Goods Sold.....			
393,000	412,400	400,000	401,800
Operating Expenses.....			
80,000	110,000	104,600	98,200
Operating Profit.....			
27,000	37,600	(4,600)	20,000

(iv) After adjustments have been made to account for identified material differences between USSub and the uncontrolled distributors, the average ratio of operating profit to sales is calculated for each of the uncontrolled distributors. Applying each ratio to USSub would lead to the following comparable operating profit (COP) for USSub:

COP	Uncontrolled distributor	OP/S (percent)	USSub
-			
A.....		1.7	
\$8,840			
B.....		3.1	
16,120			
C.....		3.8	
19,760			
D.....		4.5	
23,400			
E.....		4.7	
24,440			
F.....		4.8	
24,960			
G.....		4.9	
25,480			
H.....		6.7	
34,840			
I.....		9.9	
51,480			
J.....		10.5	
54,600			

(v) The data is not sufficiently complete to conclude that it is likely that all material differences between USSub and the uncontrolled distributors have been identified. Therefore, an arm's length range can be established only pursuant to Sec. 1.482-1(e)(2)(iii)(B). The district director measures the arm's length range by the interquartile range of results, which consists of the results ranging from \$19,760 to \$34,840. Although USSub's operating income for 1996 shows a loss of \$4,600, the district director determines that no allocation should be made, because USSub's average reported operating profit of \$20,000 is within this range.

Example 2 --Transfer of tangible property resulting in adjustment.

(i) The facts are the same as in Example 1 except that USSub reported the following income and expenses:

1995	1996	Average	1994
Sales.....			\$500,000
\$560,000	\$500,000	\$520,000	
Cost of Good Sold.....			370,000
460,000	400,000	410,000	
Operating Expenses.....			110,000
110,000	110,000	110,000	
Operating Profit.....			20,000
(10,000)	(10,000)	0	

(ii) The interquartile range of comparable operating profits remains the same as derived in Example 1: \$19,760 to \$34,840. USSub's average operating profit for the years 1994 through 1996 (\$0) falls outside this range. Therefore, the district director determines that an allocation may be appropriate.

(iii) To determine the amount, if any, of the allocation, the district director compares USSub's reported operating profit for 1996 to comparable operating profits derived from the uncontrolled distributors' results for 1996. The ratio of operating profit to sales in 1996 is calculated for each of the uncontrolled comparables and applied to USSub's 1996 sales to derive the following results:

Uncontrolled distributor	OP/S (percent)	USSub COP
C.....	0.5	
\$2,500		
D.....	1.5	
7,500		
E.....	2.0	
10,000		
A.....	1.6	
13,000		
F.....	2.8	
14,000		
B.....	2.9	
14,500		
J.....	3.0	
15,000		
I.....	4.4	
22,000		
H.....	6.9	
34,500		
G.....	7.4	
37,000		

(iv) Based on these results, the median of the comparable operating profits for 1996 is \$14,250. Therefore, USSub's income for 1996 is increased by \$24,250, the difference between USSub's reported operating profit for 1996 and the median of the comparable operating profits for 1996.

Example 3 --Multiple year analysis. (i) The facts are the same as in Example 2. In addition, the district director examines the taxpayer's results for the 1997 taxable year. As in Example 2, the district director increases USSub's income for the 1996 taxable year by \$24,250. The results for the 1997 taxable year, together with the 1995 and 1996 taxable years, are as follows:

1996	1997	Average	1995
Sales.....			\$560,000
\$500,000	\$530,000	\$530,000	
Cost of Good Sold.....			460,000
400,000	430,000	430,000	
Operating Expenses.....			110,000
110,000	110,000	110,000	
Operating Profit.....			(10,000)
(10,000)	(10,000)	(10,000)	

(ii) The interquartile range of comparable operating profits, based on average results from the uncontrolled comparables and average sales for USSub for the years 1995 through 1997, ranges from \$15,500 to \$30,000. In determining whether an allocation for the 1997 taxable year may be made, the district director compares USSub's average reported operating profit for the years 1995 through 1997 to the interquartile range of average comparable operating profits over this period. USSub's average reported operating profit is determined without regard to the adjustment made with respect to the 1996 taxable year. See Sec. 1.482-1(f) (2) (iii) (D). Therefore, USSub's average reported operating

[[Page 600]]

profit for the years 1995 through 1997 is (\$10,000). Because this amount of income falls outside the interquartile range, the district director determines that an allocation may be appropriate.

(iii) To determine the amount, if any, of the allocation for the 1997 taxable year, the district director compares USSub's reported operating profit for 1997 to the median of the comparable operating profits derived from the uncontrolled distributors' results for 1997. The median of the comparable operating profits derived from the uncontrolled comparables results for the 1997 taxable year is \$12,000. Based on this comparison, the district director increases USSub's 1997 taxable income by \$22,000, the difference between the median of the comparable operating profits for the 1997 taxable year and USSub's reported operating profit of (\$10,000) for the 1997 taxable year.

Example 4--Transfer of intangible to offshore manufacturer. (i) DevCo is a U.S. developer, producer and marketer of widgets. DevCo develops a new "high tech widget" (htw) that is manufactured by its foreign subsidiary ManuCo located in Country H. ManuCo sells the htw to MarkCo (a U.S. subsidiary of DevCo) for distribution and marketing in the United States. The taxable year 1996 is under audit, and the district director examines whether the royalty rate of 5 percent paid by ManuCo to DevCo is an arm's length consideration for the htw technology.

(ii) Based on all the facts and circumstances, the district director determines that the comparable profits method will provide the most reliable measure of an arm's length result. ManuCo is selected as the tested party because it engages in relatively routine manufacturing activities, while DevCo engages in a variety of complex activities using unique and valuable intangibles. Finally, because ManuCo engages in manufacturing activities, it is determined that the ratio of operating profit to operating assets is an appropriate profit level indicator.

(iii) Uncontrolled taxpayers performing similar functions cannot be found in country H. It is determined that data available in countries M and N provides the best match of companies in a similar market performing similar functions and bearing similar risks. Such data is sufficiently complete to identify many of the material differences between ManuCo and the uncontrolled comparables, and to make adjustments to account for such differences. However, data is not sufficiently complete so that it is likely that no material differences remain.

In particular, the differences in geographic markets might have materially affected the results of the various companies.

(iv) In a separate analysis, it is determined that the price that ManuCo charged to MarkCo for the htw's is an arm's length price under Sec. 1.482-3(b). Therefore, ManuCo's financial data derived from its sales to MarkCo are reliable. ManuCo's financial data from 1994-1996 is as follows:

			1994
1995	1996	Average	

Assets.....			
\$24,000	\$25,000	\$26,000	\$25,000
Sales to MarkCo.....			
25,000	30,000	35,000	30,000
Cost of Goods Sold.....			
6,250	7,500	8,750	7,500
Royalty to DevCo (5%).....			
1,250	1,500	1,750	1,500
Other.....			
5,000	6,000	7,000	6,000
Operating Expenses.....			
1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Operating Profit.....			
17,750	21,500	25,250	21,500

(v) Applying the ratios of average operating profit to operating assets for the 1994 through 1996 taxable years derived from a group of similar uncontrolled comparables located in country M and N to ManuCo's average operating assets for the same period provides a set of comparable operating profits. The interquartile range for these average comparable operating profits is \$3,000 to \$4,500. ManuCo's average reported operating profit for the years 1994 through 1996 (\$21,500) falls outside this range. Therefore, the district director determines that an allocation may be appropriate for the 1996 taxable year.

(vi) To determine the amount, if any, of the allocation for the 1996 taxable year, the district director compares ManuCo's reported operating profit for 1996 to the median of the comparable operating profits derived from the uncontrolled distributors' results for 1996. The median result for the uncontrolled comparables for 1996 is \$3,750. Based on this comparison, the district director increases royalties that ManuCo paid by \$21,500 (the difference between \$25,250 and the median of the comparable operating profits, \$3,750).

Example 5 Adjusting operating assets and operating profit for differences in accounts receivable. (i) USM is a U.S. company that manufactures parts for industrial equipment and sells them to its foreign parent corporation. For purposes of applying the comparable profits method, 15 uncontrolled manufacturers that are similar to USM have been identified.

(ii) USM has a significantly lower level of accounts receivable than the uncontrolled

[[Page 601]]

manufacturers. Since the rate of return on capital employed is to be used as the profit level indicator, both operating assets and operating profits must be adjusted to account for this difference. Each uncontrolled comparable's operating assets is reduced by the amount (relative to sales) by which they exceed USM's accounts receivable. Each uncontrolled comparable's operating profit is adjusted by deducting imputed interest income on the excess accounts receivable. This imputed interest income is calculated by multiplying the uncontrolled comparable's excess accounts receivable by an interest rate appropriate for short-term debt.

Example 6 Adjusting operating profit for differences in accounts payable. (i) USD is the U.S. subsidiary of a foreign corporation. USD purchases goods from its foreign parent and sells them in the U.S. market. For purposes of applying the comparable profits method, 10 uncontrolled distributors that are similar to USD have been identified.

(ii) There are significant differences in the level of accounts payable among the uncontrolled distributors and USD. To adjust for these differences, the district director increases the operating profit of the uncontrolled distributors and USD to reflect interest expense imputed to the accounts payable. The imputed interest expense for each company is calculated by multiplying the company's accounts payable by an interest rate appropriate for its short-term debt.

[T.D. 8552, 59 FR 35021, July 8, 1994; 60 FR 16703, Mar. 31, 1995]