

paragraph (a)(1), Nasdaq generally will require the issuer to have the following: (i) assets in excess of \$200 million and stockholders' equity of at least \$10 million; or (ii) assets in excess of \$100 million and stockholders' equity of at least \$20 million;

(B) There must be a minimum of 400 holders of the security, provided, however, that if the instrument is traded in \$1,000 denominations, there must be a minimum of 100 holders;

(C) For equity securities designated pursuant to this paragraph, there must be a minimum public distribution of 1,000,000 trading units;

(D) The aggregate market value/principal amount of the security will be at least \$4 million.

In addition, Nasdaq states that Merrill Lynch satisfies the listed marketplace requirement set forth in NASD rule 4420(f)(2).<sup>16</sup> Lastly, pursuant to NASD rule 4420(f)(3), prior to the commencement of trading of the Notes, Nasdaq will distribute a circular to members providing guidance regarding compliance responsibilities and requirements, including suitability recommendations, and highlighting the special risks and characteristics of the Notes. In particular, Nasdaq will advise members recommending a transaction in the Notes to: (1) Determine that such transaction is suitable for the customer; and (2) have a reasonable basis for believing that the customer can evaluate the special characteristics of, and is able to bear the financial risks of, such transaction.

The Notes will be subject to Nasdaq's continued listing criterion for other securities pursuant to NASD rule 4450(c). Under this criterion, the aggregate market value or principal amount of publicly-held units must be at least \$1 million. The Notes also must have at least two registered and active market makers as required by NASD rule 4310(c)(1). Nasdaq will also consider prohibiting the continued listing of the Notes if Merrill Lynch is not able to meet its obligations on the Notes.

#### Rules Applicable to the Trading of the Notes

Since the Notes will be deemed equity securities for the purpose of NASD rule 4420(f), the NASD and Nasdaq's existing equity trading rules will apply to the

Notes. First, pursuant to NASD rule 2310, "Recommendations to Customers (Suitability)" and NASD IM-2310-2, "Fair Dealing with Customers," NASD members must have reasonable grounds for believing that a recommendation to a customer regarding the purchase, sale or exchange of any security is suitable for such customer upon the basis of the facts, if any, disclosed by such customer as to his other security holdings and as to his financial situation and needs.<sup>17</sup> In addition, as previously mentioned, Nasdaq will distribute a circular to members and employees thereof providing guidance regarding compliance responsibilities and requirements, including suitability recommendations, and highlighting the special risks and characteristics of the Notes to, among other things, have a reasonable basis for believing that the customer can evaluate the special characteristics of, and is able to bear the financial risks of, such transaction. Second, the Notes will be subject to the equity margin rules. Lastly, the regular equity trading hours of 9:30 am to 4:00 pm will apply to transactions in the Notes.

Nasdaq represents that NASD's surveillance procedures are adequate to properly monitor the trading of the Notes. Specifically, NASD will rely on its current surveillance procedures governing equity securities, and will include additional monitoring on key pricing dates.

#### 2. Statutory Basis

Nasdaq believes that the proposed rule change is consistent with the provisions of section 15A of the Act,<sup>18</sup> in general, and with section 15A(b)(6) of the Act,<sup>19</sup> in particular, in that the proposal is designed to prevent fraudulent and manipulative acts and practices, to promote just and equitable principles of trade, to remove impediments to and perfect the mechanism of a free and open market and, in general, to protect investors and the public interest.

#### B. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Burden on Competition

Nasdaq does not believe that the proposed rule change will result in any burden on competition that is not

necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act.

#### C. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Comments on the Proposed Rule Change Received From Members, Participants, or Others

Written comments were neither solicited nor received.

#### III. Solicitation of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments concerning the foregoing, including whether the proposed rule change is consistent with the Act. Persons making written submissions should file six copies thereof with the Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 450 Fifth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20549-0609. Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rule change that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rule change between the Commission and any person, other than those that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for inspection and copying in the Commission's Public Reference Room. Copies of such filing will also be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of the NASD. All submissions should refer to file number SR-NASD-2003-70 and should be submitted by May 16, 2003.

#### I. Commission's Findings and Order Granting Accelerated Approval of Proposed Rule Change

Nasdaq has asked the Commission to approve the proposal, on an accelerated basis to accommodate the timetable for listing the Notes. The Commission notes that it has previously approved the listing of options on, and securities the performance of which have been linked to or based on, the PHLX Semiconductor Index.<sup>20</sup> The Commission has also previously approved the listing of securities with a structure identical to that of the Notes.<sup>21</sup>

After careful consideration, the Commission finds that the proposed rule change is consistent with the requirements of the Act and the rules and regulations thereunder, applicable to a national securities association, and, in particular, with the requirements of section 15A(b)(6) of the Act<sup>22</sup> in that it is designed to promote just and

<sup>16</sup> NASD rule 4420(f)(2) requires issuers of securities designated pursuant to this paragraph to be listed on The Nasdaq National Market or the NYSE or be an affiliate of a company listed on The Nasdaq National Market or the NYSE; provided, however, that the provisions of NASD rule 4450 will be applied to sovereign issuers of "other" securities on a case-by-case basis.

<sup>17</sup> NASD rule 2310(b) requires members to make reasonable efforts to obtain information concerning a customer's financial status, a customer's tax status, the customer's investment objectives, and such other information used or considered to be reasonable by such member or registered representative in making recommendations to the customer.

<sup>18</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78o-3.

<sup>19</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78o-3(6).

<sup>20</sup> See note 7, *supra*.

<sup>21</sup> See note 8, *supra*.

<sup>22</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78o-3(b)(6).