CMB International Securities | Equity Research | Company Update

ZTO Express (ZTO US)

Upbeat guidance on profitable growth in 2022E; raising earnings forecast and TP

Reiterate BUY. Management delivered a clear message in the post-results call that ZTO will put the focus on profitable growth, with net profit growth outpacing revenue growth in future. Most importantly, ZTO expects net profit growth in 4Q21E to reach 30% YoY while that in 2022E will potentially reach 30-35% YoY. What's more, ZTO is confident of expanding market share going forward (3Q21: 20.8%), through continuous capex spending to capture the demand growth. We maintain our view that the profitability for the express delivery industry will continue to improve on the back of ASP recovery, while ZTO will become a longterm winner due to strong execution and cost advantage. We revise up our 2021E/22E/23E earnings by 1%/8%/5% after adjusting up our ASP assumptions that fully offset the lower volume projection. We raise our TP from US\$39.5 to US\$44, as we roll over our valuation base to 2022E with a new target multiple of 35x.

- Earnings highlight in 3Q21. Pretax profit grew 17% YoY to RMB1.38bn, driven by 11% revenue growth YoY and 0.3ppt gross margin expansion YoY to 21.2%. Net profit slightly dropped 3% YoY to RMB1.17bn, due to the lack of tax refund (one-off in 3Q20). SG&A expense increased only 4% YoY, suggesting good cost control.
- Parcel volume growth and ASP change in line with the industry in 3Q21. ZTO's parcel volume in 3Q21 grew 23% YoY to 5.7bn units (growth rate in line with the industry average). Parcel delivery ASP dropped 7% YoY (or RMB0.09/unit) but increased 2.5% QoQ to RMB1.24/unit in 3Q21 (breakdown: [1] RMB0.04 for incentives to support network partners, and [2] RMB0.05 due to lower parcel weight). Similar to the volume, the ASP change was in line with the industry average.
- Unit cost dropped 6.7% YoY in 3Q21. ZTO's sorting hub cost dropped 2% YoY to RMB0.29/unit, driven by the continuous increase in automated sorting equipment (370 sets in 3Q21, vs 300 sets in 3Q20). Unit cost of transportation decreased 6% YoY to RMB0.5/unit, due to continuous investment in highcapacity trucks (81% of self-owned trucks were 15-17 meters long). We expect the total unit cost to drop 4% YoY in 2022E.

Earnings Summary

(YE 31 Dec)	FY19A	FY20A	FY21E	FY22E	FY23E
Revenue (RMB mn)	22,110	25,214	30,877	36,337	40,947
YoY growth (%)	26	14	22	18	13
Core net profit (RMB mn)	4,979	4,312	4,786	6,735	8,201
Core EPS (RMB)	6.35	5.43	5.73	8.07	9.82
YoY growth (%)	25.0	-14.5	5.6	40.7	21.8
Consensus EPS (RMB)	N/A	N/A	5.66	7.21	9.12
EV/EBITDA (x)	22.1	22.6	18.3	13.3	11.0
P/E (x)	33.5	39.2	34.9	24.8	20.4
P/B (x)	4.3	3.6	3.2	2.9	2.6
Yield (%)	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.2	1.5
ROE (%)	13.7	9.9	9.4	12.2	13.5
Net gearing (%)	Net cash				

Source: Company data, Bloomberg, CMBIS estimates



BUY (Maintain)

Target Price	US\$44.0
(Previous TP	US\$39.5)
Up/Downside	+39%
Current Price	US\$31.58

China Express Delivery

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Stock Data

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Mkt Cap (US\$ mn)	26,121
Avg 3 mths t/o (US\$ mn)	78
52w High/Low (US\$)	38.66/25.23
Total Issued Shares (mn)	855.3
Source: Bloomberg	

Shareholding Structure

Meisong Lai	25.6%
Alibaba	8.6%
Others	65.8%
Note: Under the weighted voti	ng rights structure,
Meisong Lai has 76.8% of the	e total voting right
Source: HKEx	

Share Performance

	Absolute	Relative
1-mth	1.7%	-3.0%
3-mth	19.8%	12.0%
6-mth	0.5%	-11.8%
Source: Bloomber	g	

12-mth Price Performance



Source: Bloomberg

Auditor: Deloitte

Related reports:

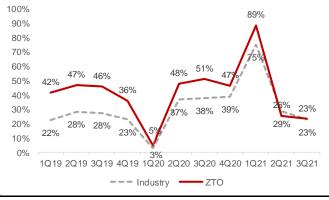
- China Express Delivery Sector -1. On-track ASP improvement in Sep; Expect further increase on the back of policy support - 20 Oct 2021
- 2. China Express Delivery Sector -Bloody battle to end soon; War for market share to continue; BUY winners in the respective playing fields - 14 Oct 2020

Figure 1: ZTO's 3Q21 results

(RMB mn)	1Q20	1Q21	Change YoY	2Q20	2Q21	Change YoY	3Q20	3Q21	Change YoY
Total revenue	3,916	6,473	65.3%	6,402	7,325	14.4%	6,639	7,391	11.3%
Cost of sales	-3,097	-5,376	73.6%	-4,633	-5,651	22.0%	-5,248	-5,822	10.9%
Gross profit	819	1,097	33.9%	1,769	1,674	-5.4%	1,391	1,568	12.7%
Other income	113	157	38.1%	190	176	-7.3%	152	182	19.6%
SG&A expenses	-560	-620	10.7%	-312	-394	26.1%	-374	-389	4.2%
EBIT	372	633	70.1%	1,647	1,456	-11.6%	1,169	1,360	16.4%
D&A	408	521	27.7%	426	-521	-222.4%	479	538	12.3%
EBITDA	780	1,154	47.9%	2,073	934	-54.9%	1,648	1,898	15.2%
Net finance income/(expense)	126	60	-52.4%	105	69	-34.7%	83	40	-52.3%
Finance income	126	75	-40.2%	114	102	-10.4%	97	92	-5.0%
Finance expenses	-0	-16	n/a	-9	-34	n/a	-14	-52	281.3%
Gain/(loss) on disposal of subsidiaries	0	0	n/a	0	0	n/a	0	5	n/a
Impairment of investment in equity investees	0	0	n/a	0	0	n/a	0	0	n/a
Fair value changes of financial instruments	0	16	n/a	0	32	n/a	0	0	n/a
FX gain/(loss)	16	-0	n/a	3	-26	n/a	-64	-8	-87.5%
Share of profit of JV and associates	-14	-25	83.7%	-2	-4	53.0%	-5	-20	272.6%
Pretax profit	501	683	36.4%	1,752	1,527	-12.8%	1,182	1,377	16.5%
Income tax	-130	-150	15.3%	-298	-255	-14.6%	28	-230	n/a
After tax profit	371	534	43.8%	1,454	1,272	-12.5%	1,210	1,148	-5.2%
MI	4	0	-97.3%	-5	20	-482.3%	-9	19	n/a
Net profit	375	534	42.4%	1,449	1,292	-10.8%	1,201	1,167	-2.9%
Ratios:			ppt			ppt			ppt
Gross margin	20.9%	16.9%	-4.0	27.6%	22.8%	-4.8	21.0%	21.2%	0.3
EBIT margin	9.5%	9.8%	0.3	25.7%	19.9%	-5.8	17.6%	18.4%	0.8
After tax profit margin	9.5%	8.2%	-1.2	22.7%	17.4%	-5.3	18.2%	15.5%	-2.7
Effective tax rate	25.9%	21.9%	-4.0	17.0%	16.7%	-0.3	-2.4%	16.7%	19.0

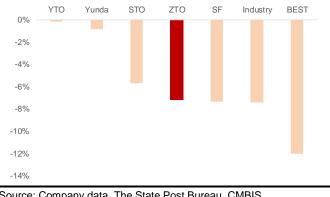
Source: Company data, CMBIS

Figure 2: ZTO's parcel volume growth in 3Q21 was in line with the industry average



Source: Company data, The State Post Bureau, CMBIS

Figure 4: ZTO achieved better than industry average ASP reduction (YoY) in 3Q21



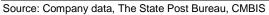
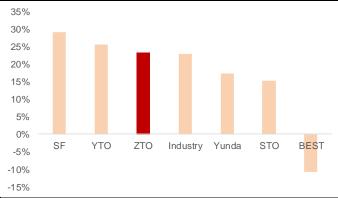
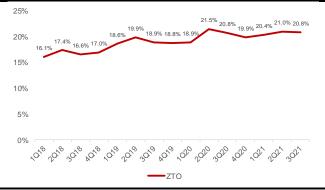


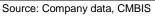
Figure 3: ZTO's parcel volume growth was only lower



Source: Company data, The State Post Bureau, CMBIS

Figure 5: ZTO's market share in China in terms of parcel volume





than that of SF and YTO in 3Q21





Figure 6: ZTO's self-owned high capacity truck ratio

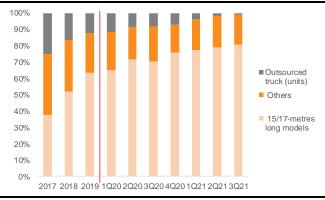
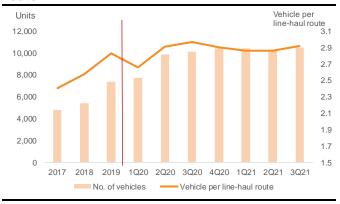
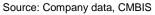
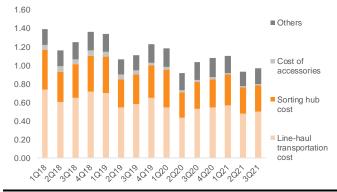


Figure 7: ZTO's number of vehicles per line-haul route

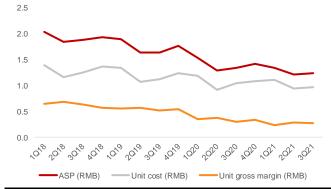


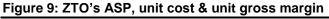






Source: Company data, CMBIS





Source: Company data, CMBIS

Source: Company data, CMBIS



Figure 10: Change in key operating assumptions

		Old			New			Change	
	2021E	2022E	2023E	2021E	2022E	2023E	2021E	2022E	2023E
Shipment volume (mn units of parcel)									
Unit of parcel	23,803	30,944	37,132	22,358	25,711	29,311	-6.1%	-16.9%	-21.1%
ASP (RMB/unit)									
Per unit of parcel	1.27	1.24	1.21	1.29	1.33	1.31	1.6%	7.1%	8.2%
Unit cost breakdown (RMB)									
Line-haul transportation cost	-0.51	-0.49	-0.48	-0.51	-0.49	-0.48	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Sorting hub cost	-0.28	-0.26	-0.24	-0.28	-0.26	-0.24	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Others	-0.19	-0.19	-0.19	-0.19	-0.19	-0.19	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	-1.00	-0.96	-0.93	-1.00	-0.96	-0.93	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unit gross margin (RMB)	0.27	0.28	0.28	0.29	0.36	0.38	7.6%	32.0%	35.5%
(RMB mn)									
Revenue									
Express delivery, accessories & others	30,240	38,330	45,076	28,865	34,124	38,512	-4.5%	-11.0%	-14.6%
Freight forwarding services	2,142	2,356	2,592	2,012	2,213	2,434	-6.1%	-6.1%	-6.1%
Total	32,382	40,686	47,668	30,877	36,337	40,947	-4.7%	-10.7%	-14.1%
Revenue growth								ppt	
Express delivery, accessories & others	30%	27%	18%	24%	18%	13%	(5.9)	(8.5)	(4.7)
Freight forwarding services	15%	10%	10%	8%	10%	10%	(7.0)	0.0	0.0
Revenue	28%	26%	17%	22%	18%	13%	(6.0)	(8.0)	(4.5)
Gross margin								ppt	
Express delivery, accessories & others	21%	22%	23%	23%	27%	29%	1.3	5.2	5.8
Freight forwarding services	11%	13%	14%	12%	13%	14%	1.0	0.0	0.0
Gross margin	21%	22%	23%	22%	27%	28%	1.2	4.8	5.4
Net profit	4,727	6,249	7,778	4,786	6,735	8,201	1.2%	7.8%	5.4%

Source: Company data, CMBIS estimates

Figure 11: Earnings sensitivity to ASP and unit line-haul transportation cost

2022E Net profit (RMB mn)			AS	SP (RMB/uni	it)	
		1.26	1.30	1.33	1.35	1.39
	-0.518	4,834	5,653	6,200	6,746	7,565
	-0.504	5,155	5,975	6,521	7,067	7,886
Unit line-haul	-0.494	5,369	6,189	6,735	7,281	8,101
transportation cost (RMB)	-0.484	5,583	6,403	6,949	7,495	8,315
	-0.469	5,904	6,724	7,270	7,816	8,636

Source: Company data, CMBIS estimates

Figure 12: Earnings sensitivity to ASP and unit sorting hub cost

0 0			0			
2022E Net profit (RMB mn)			AS	SP (RMB/un	it)	
		1.26	1.30	1.33	1.35	1.39
	-0.272	5,088	5,908	6,454	7,000	7,820
	-0.264	5,257	6,076	6,622	7,169	7,988
Unit sorting hub cost	-0.259	5,369	6,189	6,735	7,281	8,101
(RMB)	-0.254	5,482	6,301	6,847	7,394	8,213
	-0.246	5,650	6,470	7,016	7,562	8,382

Source: Company data, CMBIS estimates





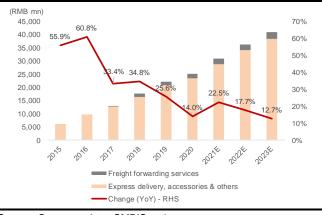
Source: Company data, CMBIS estimate

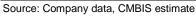
Figure 15: ZTO's gross margin trend

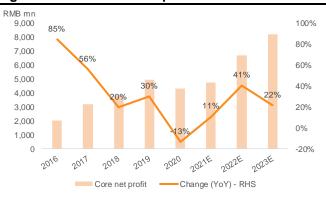


Source: Company data, CMBIS estimate

Figure 14: ZTO's revenue forecast









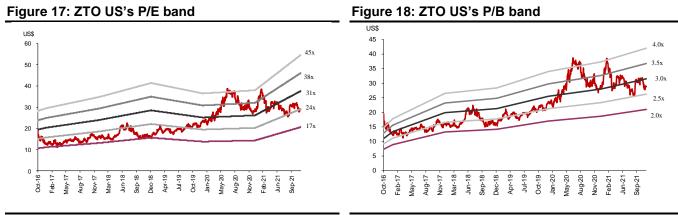
Source: Company data, CMBIS estimate





Valuation

ZTO has been trading at a forward P/E range between 24x-45x since mid-2019. The stock saw support at 24x P/E recently and we see this level as a defensive level. We raise our TP from US\$39.5 to US\$44, as we roll over our valuation base to 2022E with a new target multiple of 35x, the mid-point between peak (45x) and the historical average (26x). Our higher-than-average multiple is to reflect the Company's gradual market share gain and the strong recovery of profitability.



Source: Bloomberg, Company data, CMBIS estimates

Source: Bloomberg, Company data, CMBIS estimates

Major risk factors: (1) further slowdown of online retail sales; (2) volatile ASP trend;
(3) further increase in diesel price.



Financial Summary

Income statement					
YE 31 Dec (RMB mn)	FY19A	FY20A	FY21E	FY22E	FY23E
Revenue	22,110	25,214	30,877	36,337	40,947
Cost of sales	-15,489	-19,377	-24,119	-26,667	-29,405
Gross profit	6,621	5,837	6,757	9,670	11,542
Other operating income	388	581	618	363	409
SG&A expense	-1,546	-1,664	-1,914	-2,180	-2,375
EBIT	5,463	4,754	5,460	7,853	9,576
Net finance income/(cost)	585	407	261	186	199
Finance income	585	443	381	313	291
Finance expenses	0	-35	-120	-127	-92
Gain/(loss) on disposal	-3	1	0	0	0
Impairment of equity investees	-56	-1	0	0	0
Unrealized gain fr. equity investee	754	0	0	0	0
FX gain/(loss)	13	-127	0	0	0
Profit of JV & associates	-8	-19	-6	3	17
Pretax profit	6,750	5,016	5,715	8,042	9,792
Income tax	-1,078	-690	-914	-1,287	-1,567
After tax profit	5,671	4,326	4,801	6,755	8,226
МІ	3	-14	-14	-20	-25
Net profit	5,674	4,312	4,786	6,735	8,201
Recurring net profit	4,979	4,312	4,786	6,735	8,201
D&A	1,265	1,840	2,664	3,358	4,012
EBITDA	6,727	6,595	8,124	11,210	13,588

YE 31 Dec (RMB mn)	FY19A	FY20A	FY21E	FY22E	FY23E
Pretax profit	6,750	5,016	5,715	8,042	9,792
Finance cost	0	35	120	127	92
Interest income	-585	-443	-381	-313	-291
Profit or loss of associates	8	19	6	-3	-17
Depreciation & amortization	1,265	1,840	2,664	3,358	4,012
Income tax paid	-1,119	-690	-914	-1,287	-1,567
Change in working capital	-260	-1,381	-515	-255	-513
Others	-338	111	0	0	0
Cash flow from operation	5,719	4,508	6,694	9,668	11,508
Net capex on PP&E	-4,636	-7,853	-9,000	-8,500	-8,000
Purchase of land use rights	-591	-1,927	-700	-700	-700
Investment in JV/associates	-218	0	-50	-50	-200
Investment in subsidiaries	-20	0	0	0	0
Interest received	585	443	381	313	291
Others	629	5,346	-0	-0	-0
Cash flow from investing	-4,250	-3,992	-9,369	-8,937	-8,609
Equity financing/(repurchase)	-763	9,842	0	0	0
Net bank borrowings	0	1,433	2,700	-1,000	-1,000
Dividend paid	-1,271	-1,667	-1,355	-1,484	-2,088
Others	51	-1,271	0	0	0
Cash flow from financing	-1,982	8,337	1,226	-2,611	-3,180
Change in cash	-513	8,853	-1,449	-1,880	-280
Cash at beginning of the year	4,623	5,270	14,213	12,764	10,884
Exchange gains/(losses) and others	1,161	89	0	0	0
Cash at the end of the year	5,270	14,213	12,764	10,884	10,604

Cash flow summary

Balance sheet						Key ratios					
YE 31 Dec (RMB mn)	FY19A	FY20A	FY21E	FY22E	FY23E	YE 31 Dec	FY19A	FY20A	FY21E	FY22E	FY23E
Non-current assets	25,792	36,880	44,309	50,524	55,836	Sales mix (%)					
PP&E	12,471	18,565	25,007	30,269	34,390	Express delivery, accessories & others	94%	93%	93%	94%	94%
Land use right	2,509	4,361	4,961	5,548	6,121	Freight forwarding services	6%	7%	7%	6%	6%
Investment in JV/associates	3,109	3,224	3,268	3,321	3,538	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Operating lease right-of-use assets	902	876	936	996	1,056	Profit & loss ratio (%)					
Goodwill	4,242	4,242	4,242	4,242	4,242	Gross margin	29.9	23.1	21.9	26.6	28.2
Long term financing receivables	550	1,970	2,259	2,519	2,866	EBITDA margin	30.4	26.2	26.3	30.9	33.2
Intangible assets	48	42	36	29	23	EBIT margin	24.7	18.9	17.7	21.6	23.4
Long-term investment	946	1,842	1,842	1,842	1,842	Net profit margin	25.7	17.2	15.5	18.6	20.1
Others	612	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037	Growth (%)					
Deferred tax assets	404	721	721	721	721	Revenue	25.6	14.0	22.5	17.7	12.7
Current assets	20,098	22,325	21,471	19,489	19,773	Gross profit	23.4	(11.8)	15.8	43.1	19.4
Inventories	44	53	79	67	94	EBITDA	29.7	(2.0)	23.2	38.0	21.2
Account receivables	676	746	1,030	1,060	1,296	EBIT	26.1	(13.0)	14.8	43.8	21.9
Financing receivables	511	492	777	657	959	Core net profit	30.3	(13.4)	11.0	40.7	21.8
Advances to suppliers	438	589	589	589	589	Balance sheet ratio					
Short-term investment	11,113	3,690	3,690	3,690	3,690	Current ratio (x)	3.0	2.4	1.7	1.7	1.8
Others	2,039	2,408	2,408	2,408	2,408	Trade receivable turnover days	15	29	36	35	35
Restricted cash	7	133	133	133	133	Inventory turnover days	1	1	1	1	1
Cash	5,270	14,213	12,764	10,884	10,604	Payable turnover days	33	29	28	28	28
Current liabilities	6,681	9,348	12,476	11,438	10,896	Net debt / total equity (%)	Net cash				
Account payables	1,475	1,636	2,065	2,027	2,485	Profitability (%)					
Operating lease liabilities	299	246	246	246	246	ROA	13.3	8.2	7.7	9.9	11.3
Bank borrowings	0	1,433	4,133	3,133	2,133	ROE	13.7	9.9	9.4	12.2	13.5
Tax payable	80	49	49	49	49	Per share data					
Advanced from customers	1,211	1,120	1,120	1,120	1,120	EPS (RMB)	7.24	5.43	5.73	8.07	9.82
Others	3,616	4,864	4,864	4,864	4,864	Core EPS (RMB)	6.35	5.43	5.73	8.07	9.82
Non-current liabilities	806	757	757	757	757	BVPS (RMB)	48.98	58.67	62.78	69.07	76.39
Bank borrowings	0	0	0	0	0	DPS (RMB)	2.13	1.70	1.78	2.50	3.05
Deferred tax liabilities	208	255	255	255	255						
Non-current operating lease	504	502	502	502	502						
Others	94	-0	-0	-0	-0						
Shareholders' equity	38,303	48,979	52,410	57,662	63,775						
MI	101	121	135	156	180						
Source: Company data CME											

Source: Company data, CMBIS estimates



Disclosures & Disclaimers

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