BPO and KPO | Company Update

AJE Acquisition Deepens Content capabilities and B2C Access.

- MPS announced acquisition of 100% stake in Research Square AJE for a cash consideration of \$8.4mn (Rs.700mn) for an implied P/S of 0.3x.
- Acquisition is aimed at complementing MPS in: a) Scaling up AI capabilities, b) Entry into B2C marketplace, c) Expansion into China, d) Value chain advancement and e) Premier Customer partnership.
- The transaction is valued at ~0.3x P/S on CY23 Rev. of ~\$30mn, which is very attractive as management is confident and have decent visibility on its roadmap to take current Early teens EBIDTA margins to reach 25-30% levels on FY25 exit basis.
- This acquisition reflects the right alignment of MPS's FY28 vision (to achieve Rs.1.5bn Rev). Transaction will lead to an uptick in growth prospects, thus driving up our growth confidence and TP to Rs.2120 valued at 20x of FY26E EPS (implies just 1x on PEG basis).

MPS acquires AJE: Forging Academic Publishing Dominance.

American Journal Experts (Research Square), founded in 2004 in Durham, USA, is a subsidiary of Springer Nature Group (MPS's largest client). It has a strong presence in the AI, NLP market & operates globally, including a subsidiary in Beijing, China, serving over 1k+ Chinese research institutions with language editing & related services. AJE Revenues stood at \$35mn/\$36mn/\$34mn for CY20/21/22 respectively with 65% Gross margins.

AJE Acquisition Fuels Content & Platform Capabilities / Geo Expansion.

MPS acquired AJE to gain AI editing tech, enter new markets (China accounts 65% of rev of acquired enities), & become the sole end-to-end academic publishing service provider. Research Square has a successful AI editing tool, but was used for captive author base of Springer Nature, but will now be showcase to other publisher B2C base and thus has significant revenue synergies.

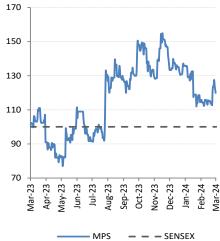


СМР	Rs 1,611				
Target / Upside	Rs 2	2,120	/ 32%		
NIFTY	22,494				
Scrip Details					
Equity / FV	Rs 17	1mn /	Rs 10		
Market Cap	Rs 27bn				
	USD 329.4mn				
52-week High/Low	Rs	1,885	6/ 814		
Avg. Volume (no)		2	1,762		
Bloom Code		N	IPS IN		
Price Performance	1M	3M	12M		
Absolute (%)	7	(4)	49		
Rel to NIFTY (%)	4	(11)	22		

Shareholding Pattern

	Jun'23	Sep'23 I	Dec'23
Promoters	68.3	68.3	68.3
MF/Banks/FIs	0.6	0.6	0.6
FIIs	3.8	3.7	3.7
Public / Others	27.2	27.4	27.4

MPS Relative to SENSEX



FINANCIALS (Rs Mn)

Particulars	FY22A	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Revenue	4,489	5,011	5,453	7,728	8,663
Growth(%)	6.2	11.6	8.8	41.7	12.1
EBITDA	1,260	1,566	1,735	2,251	2,635
OPM(%)	28.1	31.3	31.8	29.1	30.4
PAT	871	1,092	1,226	1,517	1,797
Growth(%)	48.7	25.3	12.3	23.7	18.5
EPS(Rs.)	48.9	64.0	72.2	89.3	105.8
Growth(%)	50.7	30.9	12.8	23.7	18.5
PER(x)	33.0	25.2	22.3	18.0	15.2
ROANW(%)	23.3	27.6	27.2	29.4	29.9
ROACE(%)	23.0	26.9	26.4	28.9	29.5

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Acquisition offers tremendous scalability and attractive ROI

Less competition in AI in Scholarly publishing, Sole player in providing end-to-end academic publishing services, Expansion in scope of work to authors beyond Springer nature provides huge growth opportunity to MPS. The company plans to prune some non-profitable customer base which in turn would help it achieve strong gains in profitability and thus may see payback in about 2years.

AJE: AI-Powered Editing, Targeting B2C Growth

AJE LLC operates primarily in the transactional B2C space, boasting commendable gross margins attributed to its emphasis on automation and the integration of AI/ML in its editing processes. The company harbors ambitions to tap into the burgeoning AI NLP market, forecasted to reach \$112 billion by 2030 with a CAGR of 25% (although specific TAM for AJE would be much smaller sub set of this). Springer Nature initially acquired a minority stake in AJE LLC in 2016, subsequently increasing its ownership to a majority share in 2018 and finalizing a complete acquisition in 2022. The objective of the transaction was to boost the experience of the Content creator for its author base that creates scholarly content which goes beyond the paywall. Thus, the entity was limiting itself to only captive consumption and was missing out opportunities for B2B side of business (which now opens up for MPS). AJE's clientele spans a broad spectrum of author base given its B2C model which minimizes the risk of overdependency on any single customer. The AOV of Curie remains modest at \$132, while standard editing package at \$275 and premium editing packages at \$475 p.a..

Pioneering AJE's Confidence in Competitive Landscape

While acknowledging the eventual emergence of competitors in the B2C AI editing space, AJE emphasizes its current position of strength due to its pioneering efforts and proprietary LLM technology. This advantage, however, is not viewed as an insurmountable barrier to future competitors. Despite this, AJE expresses confidence in its ability to maintain a competitive edge.

This confidence stems from their growth trajectory, particularly within the B2C author editing sector. They highlight the B2C sector's growth as exceeding that of the B2B space, suggesting a potentially lucrative and under-exploited market opportunity. This unique positioning within Springer Nature, combined with their observed B2C growth, underscores AJE's optimistic outlook on their ability to not only compete but thrive in the evolving landscape of AI-powered editing solutions.

Strong focus on leveraging AJE capabilities

AJE is primarily into B2C nature of work while MPS was pre-dominantly in B2B. This acquisition will help MPS cross-sell AJE capabilities to its customers. Earlier AJE could not sell services to Spring nature's competitors as SN was a publisher, now it will open opportunities to sell solutions across board which will help realize revenue synergies in short term and cost synergies in medium term. **First mover Advantage**: AJE uses AI in two ways i.e. 1) Internal efficiency and content efficacy and 2) Licensing Curie as SaaS platform. Management pointed out that there is less competition in AI for Scholarly/Scientific Publishing market, which gives it a First mover advantage. Additionally, MPS will continue to invest and implement in suit of AI solutions in their own workforce programs to help improve efficiency and margins.



What makes this acquisition unique?

Previous Acquisitions like Highwire and TIS saw revenue run-off as customers moved out mainly due to a) High revenue concentration of top clients and 2) Low customer satisfaction.

But with the acquisition of AJE, Revenue is **highly diversified** as it is B2C in nature and has **high customer satisfaction** with NPS score above 60. Management remained confident that It won't face revenue run-off situation like the previous acquisitions, but expect some conscious discontinuation of unprofitable projects which will lead to revenue in the range of Rs.2bn-Rs.2.5bn in FY25.

Business Overview and History

American Journal Experts (AJE), an author solutions company was established in 2004 in Durham, North Carolina, USA. In 2020, Research Square Company was formed to unite the two businesses i.e. American Journal Experts (AJE) and Research Square.

AJE LLC: It is a subsidiary of Springer Nature Group, established in 2004, and headquartered in Durham, North Carolina, USA, is a leading scientific language editing service provider and trusted partner to academic and author communities with >1M manuscripts edited.

AJE: It is a transactional B2C-dominated business with excellent gross margins. AJE's strong gross margins are driven by a focus on automation and applying ML/AI in the editing process. AJE LLC delivers a wide range of digital language editing services under the brands American Journal Experts ("AJE") and Springer Nature Author Services ("SNAS"). These services comprise language editing, academic translations in several languages, scientific editing, formatting services and custom illustration.

American Journal Online (AJO): it is a 100% subsidiary of AJE LLC headquartered in Beijing, China, and was established in 2019. American Journal Online functions as a wholly foreign owned enterprise with a dedicated local team. Its business portfolio contains services identical to AJE LLC's. Since 2004, it has served more than 1,000 Chinese research institutions and groups and has edited more than 520,000 Chinese research manuscripts. AJO has a long-term commitment to supporting the Chinese research community with high quality services and superior customer support.

The transaction perimeter composed of two legal entities, one registered in the US and another registered in China, and additional two products as detailed below, owned by Springer Science+Business Media LLC:

- Curie: It is an AI-based proprietary language SaaS platform which provides intelligent suggestions, improves 'Start typing here' writing structure, enhances flow, and assists 'Start typing here' with citations, thus facilitating the creation of high-quality academic content. The platform improves language quality by enhancing phrasing, article use, grammar and makes direct edits using tracked changes.
- Research Quality Evaluation (RQE): Services engage qualified reviewers to expedite the peer review process. With its team of active researchers with terminal degrees (for example, PhD, MD, and DrPh), RQE helps eliminate publishing bottlenecks by speeding up the peer review process.



Strategic Advantages

- Scaling up AI capabilities: MPS invested in developing Bengaluru-based MPS Labs a few years ago while AJE has a long track record of internal AI/ML applications for scientific language editing. AJE launched Curie a Microsoft Word plugin for scientific writers. This allows MPS to enter and compete in the digital editing market and further enhance AI-driven capabilities and consistent innovation through MPS labs.
- Expansion in China: After adding Australia and New Zealand in 2023 through the majority investment in Liberate Learning, the entry into China further diversifies MPS's business. China has been the primary market for AJE (accounts 2/3rd of its revenues) for several years and the AJE's US origin and global brand provides a strong platform for international expansion. Expansion into China help diversify the business and strengthen global presence.
- Value Chain Advancement: AJE is a long-standing language editing service provider for STM publishers. AJE's acquisition advances MPS upstream in the value chain, bringing it closer to authors. The strategic move will gradually make MPS even more relevant in the marketplace. MPS now stands as the only global player with the end-to-end capabilities to service academic publishing from author to researcher.
- Premier Customer Partnership: AJE LLC gives a unique opportunity to MPS to strengthen its association with Springer Nature, one of the leading STM publishers and the largest client of MPS. It will help create tremendous value by advancing its strategic partnership.
- Definitive entry into the B2C marketplace: AJE Tailors its customer Acquisition Strategy into Three Distinct Strategies: B2C, B2B and B2B2C. This allows MPS to target B2C in its offering basket to other clients:

Exhibit 1: Target Clients

B2C	Individuals (mostly researchers at various career stages)	 Referral programs Loyalty discounts Online ads Other ads (SEO, 3rd party ads) Content and Events
B2B	Universities, Laboratories, Publishers, Learned Societies etc.	 Products sold through in-house and parent company B2B sales team
ب المحمد B2B2C	Researchers within Institutions (Universities, Learned Societies etc.) and Research Offices	 Lead generation with the support of AJE's parent company's institutional sales team

Source: Company, DART

Exhibit 2: Key Assumptions in our estimates

Assumptions Table	FY22	FY23	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
USD revenue growth (%)	5.4	3.0	6.1	40.0	11.9
INR revenue growth (%)	6.2	11.6	8.8	41.7	12.9
EBIT margins (%)	23.5	27.4	28.2	25.5	26.4
EPS growth (%)	50.7	30.5	12.8	23.7	23.7
USD/INR	74.5	80.8	82.9	83.9	84.5
Source: Company, DART					



Management Confident on turnaround: Management is pretty confident on strong turnaround for AJE biz and thus expect flat to small decline in revenues for FY25 and expect margins to improve sharply from early teens to late twenties in first year itself. If we would go by that assessment than our earnings estimate may see uptick of 5-7% for FY25/FY26.

	0			•			
Particulars	Dolat Estimates			Management's Expectations			
Particulars	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E	
Revenues (INR Mn)	5,453	7,728	8,663	5,532	7,998	8,957	
EBITDA Margin AJE (%)	13.0	16.5	22.0	13.0	19.3	27.5	
New EBITDA combined (INR Mn)	1,735	2,251	2,635	1,780	2,374	2,838	
Margin (%)	31.8	29.1	30.4	32.2	29.7	31.7	
PAT (INR Mn)	1,226	1,517	1,797	1,259	1,597	1,932	
EPS (abs)	72.3	89.4	106.0	74.0	94.0	114.0	
Conservative by %	2.3%	4.8%	7.0%				

Exhibit 3: Dolat Estimates v/s Management's Expectations (based call commentary)

Source: Company, DART

Change in Estimates

Acquisition of Research Square AJE is a significant development for MPS. Accounting for acquired business (to be consolidated starting Mar'24), we raise Revenue growth estimates by 2%/30%/30% for FY24E/FY25E/FY26E. Expect integration and higher amortization charge along with lower EBITDA margins in near term to negatively impact OPM by 113bps/414bps/264bps for FY24E/FY25E/FY26E respectively. We upgraded overall EPS growth by 8.6%/15.2% for FY25E/FY26E respectively.

Deutieuleus (Deuma)	FY23A		FY24E			FY25E			FY26E	
Particulars (Rs. mn)	Actual	Old	New	Chg. (%)	Old	New	Chg. (%)	Old	New	Chg. (%)
USD Revenue	62.0	64.3	65.8	2.3	70.9	92.1	29.9	78.8	102.5	30.1
YoY growth,	3.0	3.7	6.1		10.2	40.0		11.1	11.3	
INR Revenue	5,011	5,332	5,453	2.3	5,948	7,728	29.9	6,657	8,663	30.1
YoY growth,	11.6	6.4	8.8		11.6	41.7		11.9	12.1	
EBIT	1,373	1,564	1,536	(1.8)	1,760	1,967	11.8	1,962	2,327	18.6
EBIT Margin,	27.4	29.3	28.2	(113 bps)	29.6	25.5	(414 bps)	29.5	26.9	(264 bps)
Net Profit	1,092	1,250	1,226	(1.9)	1,397	1,517	8.6	1,561	1,797	15.1
EPS (Rs)	64.0	73.7	72.3	(1.9)	82.4	89.4	8.6	92.0	106.0	15.2

Exhibit 4: Change in Estimates

Source: DART, Company

Valuation

The acquisition of Research Square AJE has been done at an attractive price. We believe the stock is currently trading at an attractive valuation of 14.7x on FY26E earnings, and thus may see significant re-rating as it would see synergistic gains through improved profitability of acquired assets over FY25. We value MPS at 20x on FY26E EPS of Rs.106 with the TP of Rs.2120 and assign Buy Rating on the stock.



Annexures

Exhibit 5: Revenue trend from subsidiaries

Revenue (INR Mn)	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
MPS North America LLC	657	842	924	872
MPS Interactive Systems Limited	643	474	539	695
E.I. Design			311	
MPS Europa AG	121	111	152	102
TOPSIM GmbH	173	156	149	157
Total	1,594	1,582	1,763	1,826
Growth YoY (%)		(0.8)	11.5	3.5

Source: Company, DART

Exhibit 6: Historical Acquisitions

Period	Date	Target	Stake	Cost (Rs. mn)	Revenue	Comment
Q4FY24	29-Feb-24	Research Square AJE	100%	\$8.4mn	\$34mn	Acquired Research Square for its AI editing tech and China presence, enhancing its academic publishing services and relationship with Springer Nature.
Q2FY23	29-Aug-23	LLG Acquisition	65%	AUD 9.3mn	AUD 8.3mn	LLG has a presence in the APAC markets, which is outperforming other mature markets, and this will help MPS to tap new regions rather than targeting its traditional markets.
Q1FY23	30-May-22	E.I. Design Private Limited	100%	INR 40cr	\$6.7mn	The acquisition of El Design furthers the inherent momentum in our eLearning business. MPS Interactive will benefit from the significant operational efficiency gains that will be enabled by El Design's proprietary operating model.
Q2FY21	01-Jul-20	HighWire	100%	\$7.1mn	\$19mn	Through the HighWire acquisition, MPS expects to scale its platform solutions business segment and strengthen its positioning in the Academic and STM publishing community.
Q2FY19	18-Jul-18	TIS	100%	INR 80cr	INR 140cr	The acquisition adds a global sales and marketing engine that has a rich background in scaling business and will unlock combined value. MPS has a strong track record in making publishing smarter through efficient workflows and rich platform solutions, and we look forward to synergies to enable this in the Enterprise Learning space through TIS.
Q1FY18	01-Apr-17	Think Subscription	100%	N.M.	N.M.	THINK will not have a material effect on revenues and profits of MPS
Q2FY17	01-Jul-16	Magplus	N.M.	N.M.	N.M.	Acquisition of Mag+ has enhanced its platform capabilities and expanded reach into newer publishing markets including enterprises & magazine publishers.
Q4FY15	30-3.2015	TSI Evolve	N.M.	\$1mn	\$5.4mn	N.M.
Q3FY15	01-Oct-14	Electronic Publishing Services	N.M.	N.M.	N.M.	N.M.
Q1FY13	19-Jun-13	Elements LLC	100%	N.M.	N.M.	N.M.

Source: Company, DART



Financial Performance

(Rs Mn)	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Revenue	5,011	5,453	7,728	8,663
Total Expense	3,444	3,719	5,477	6,029
COGS	2,128	2,397	3,495	3,861
Employees Cost	0	0	0	0
Other expenses	1,316	1,322	1,982	2,168
EBIDTA	1,566	1,735	2,251	2,635
Depreciation	194	198	284	308
EBIT	1,373	1,536	1,967	2,327
Interest	11	8	24	27
Other Income	108	129	93	113
Exc. / E.O. items	0	0	0	0
EBT	1,469	1,657	2,036	2,413
Tax	377	431	519	615
RPAT	1,092	1,226	1,517	1,797
Minority Interest	0	0	0	0
Profit/Loss share of associates	0	0	0	0
АРАТ	1,092	1,226	1,517	1,797

(Rs Mn)	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Sources of Funds				
Equity Capital	171	171	171	171
Minority Interest	0	0	0	0
Reserves & Surplus	4,066	4,614	5,367	6,317
Net Worth	4,237	4,785	5,539	6,488
Total Debt	0	0	0	0
Net Deferred Tax Liability	162	162	162	162
Total Capital Employed	4,399	4,947	5,701	6,650

Applications of Funds				
Net Block	1,716	2,448	2,459	2,501
CWIP	0	0	0	0
Investments	1,283	1,283	1,283	1,283
Current Assets, Loans & Advances	2,507	2,095	3,162	4,023
Inventories	0	0	0	0
Receivables	866	896	1,270	1,519
Cash and Bank Balances	580	67	411	904
Loans and Advances	0	0	0	0
Other Current Assets	1,061	1,131	1,480	1,600
Less: Current Liabilities & Provisions	1,107	880	1,203	1,157
Payables	204	199	299	327
Other Current Liabilities	904	680	905	831
sub total				
Net Current Assets	1,399	1,216	1,958	2,866
Total Assets	4,399	4,947	5,701	6,650

E – Estimates



Particulars	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
(A) Margins (%)				
Gross Profit Margin	57.5	56.0	54.8	55.4
EBIDTA Margin	31.3	31.8	29.1	30.4
EBIT Margin	27.4	28.2	25.5	26.9
Tax rate	25.7	26.0	25.5	25.5
Net Profit Margin	21.8	22.5	19.6	20.7
(B) As Percentage of Net Sales (%)				
COGS	42.5	44.0	45.2	44.6
Employee	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	26.3	24.2	25.6	25.0
(C) Measure of Financial Status				
Gross Debt / Equity	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Interest Coverage	123.7	189.6	82.0	86.2
Inventory days	0	0	0	0
Debtors days	63	60	60	64
Average Cost of Debt				
Payable days	15	13	14	14
Working Capital days	102	81	92	121
FA T/O	2.9	2.2	3.1	3.5
(D) Measures of Investment				
AEPS (Rs)	64.0	72.2	89.3	105.8
CEPS (Rs)	75.3	83.9	106.0	123.9
DPS (Rs)	20.0	39.9	44.9	49.9
Dividend Payout (%)	31.3	55.3	50.3	47.2
BVPS (Rs)	248.3	281.6	326.0	381.9
RoANW (%)	27.6	27.2	29.4	29.9
RoACE (%)	26.9	26.4	28.9	29.5
RoAIC (%)	40.4	35.3	38.7	42.2
(E) Valuation Ratios				
CMP (Rs)	1611	1611	1611	1611
P/E	25.2	22.3	18.0	15.2
Mcap (Rs Mn)	27,374	27,374	27,374	27,374
MCap/ Sales	5.5	5.0	3.5	3.2
EV	26,794	27,306	26,963	26,470
EV/Sales	5.3	5.0	3.5	3.1
EV/EBITDA	17.1	15.7	12.0	10.0
P/BV	6.5	5.7	4.9	4.2
Dividend Yield (%)	1.2	2.5	2.8	3.1
(F) Growth Rate (%)				
Revenue	11.6	8.8	41.7	12.1
EBITDA	24.3	10.7	29.8	17.0
EBIT	30.2	11.9	28.1	18.3
PBT	24.6	12.8	22.9	18.5
АРАТ	25.3	12.3	23.7	18.5
EPS	30.9	12.8	23.7	18.5

E – Estimates



Particulars	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Profit before tax	1,469	1,657	2,036	2,413
Depreciation & w.o.	195	198	284	308
Net Interest Exp	(33)	(8)	(24)	(27)
Direct taxes paid	(354)	(431)	(519)	(615)
Change in Working Capital	(164)	(329)	(399)	(414)
Non Cash	15	0	0	0
(A) CF from Operating Activities	1,128	1,088	1,378	1,664
Capex {(Inc.)/ Dec. in Fixed Assets n WIP}	(375)	(930)	(295)	(350)
Free Cash Flow	1,086	158	1,083	1,314
(Inc)./ Dec. in Investments	(311)	0	0	0
Other	38	0	0	0
(B) CF from Investing Activities	(647)	(930)	(295)	(350)
Issue of Equity/ Preference	0	0	0	0
Inc./(Dec.) in Debt	0	0	0	0
Interest exp net	0	0	0	0
Dividend Paid (Incl. Tax)	(513)	(678)	(763)	(848)
Other	(187)	8	24	27
(C) CF from Financing	(701)	(670)	(739)	(821)
Net Change in Cash	(215)	(513)	343	493
Opening Cash balances	795	580	67	411
Closing Cash balances	580	67	411	904

Notes



DART RATING MATRIX

Total Return Expectation (12 Months	Total Return	Expectation	(12	Months
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Buy	> 20%
Accumulate	10 to 20%
Reduce	0 to 10%
Sell	< 0%

Rating and Target Price History



Month	Rating	TP (Rs.)	Price (Rs.)	
May-23	Accumulate	1,210	1,029	
Aug-23	Accumulate	1,460	1,375	
Aug-23	Accumulate	1,710	1,570	
Oct-23	Accumulate	1,630	1,546	
Jan-24	Accumulate	1,660	1,492	
*Price as on recommendation date				

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