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Jack Ma at Alibaba: Building a Learning Organisation¹

In September 2018 Alibaba's co-founder and executive chairman, Jack Ma, announced his plans to step down from the \$420 billion Chinese internet company to pursue philanthropy in education. With a net worth of more than \$40 billion, making him China's richest man, Ma stated that he would remain on Alibaba's board of directors and continue to mentor the company's senior managers.

A former English teacher and volunteer tour guide, Ma started Alibaba in 1999 with 17 others – some of them his students – out of his apartment in Hangzhou. In September 2014 the company's IPO on the New York Stock Exchange raised \$25 billion, the largest stock market flotation in history. By transforming the way Chinese people shop and pay for things, Ma built Alibaba into one of the world's most valuable companies. By 2018 it had over 100,000 employees and around \$40 billion in revenue from its 10 businesses, including Taobao, TMall, Cainiao and Ant Financial.

"I'm very proud that Alibaba now has the structure, corporate culture, governance and system for grooming talent that allows me to step away without causing disruption," Ma told the press when he announced his retirement and plans to return to his first love: education.²

Alibaba in 2018

On Singles' Day 2018³, Alibaba's websites generated \$25 billion in sales from 1.5 billion transactions, generating 812 million packages to be delivered by every mode of transport known to man.⁴ Conceived in 2009 by Ma's successor Daniel Zhang, the success of Singles' Day tracks the growth and evolution of Alibaba.⁵ (**Exhibit 1**)

From multiple web-based businesses to package delivery, logistics and services including cloud computing and data analytics through to online payments, the Alibaba of 2018 had grown from a simple storefront and internet business to a comprehensive business network which came together to deliver impressive profitability and growth (**Exhibits 2, 3 and 4**).

Alibaba's e-commerce platforms, Taobao and Tmall, boast more than 550 million annual active consumers. The company is part owner of China Smart Logistics, or 'Cainiao', which combines 15 logistics partners employing more than 1.5 million people across 600 cities in China. Alibaba is also the largest provider of cloud computing services in China.

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