



How to Choose a 3PL for Your Ecommerce Business

Learn the top questions you should ask and details to consider when sourcing a fulfillment partner.

Introduction

Whether you're hoping to transition fulfillment from your home to a professional, preparing to launch a new brand, or looking to move from managing your own warehouse, you're in the right place. ShipBob has helped thousands of ecommerce brands of all sizes be more successful online by offering a best-in-class fulfillment solution with years of expertise.

One of the common misconceptions we hear most often is that a 3PL isn't worth the costs. The truth is, you don't have to start off shipping thousands of orders monthly to reap the benefits of having a 3PL partner. Many brands learn early on that there are hidden costs to self-fulfilling orders and managing a warehouse, and that partnering with a 3PL is a smart investment that can save you time and money.

Hear from a fast-growing brand that's worked with several 3PLs:



I've talked to people who think they save money by fulfilling themselves. Their first question is always 'is a 3PL worth the extra expense?' We see outsourcing fulfillment as a cost-savings and believe it will save you money in the long run. 3PLs negotiate rates, give you back all the time you'd spend stuffing mailers, and reduce the errors you'd make.

We looked into opening our own warehouses and hiring employees, but couldn't come close with what 3PLs charge for picking, packing, and shipping.

We'd also be worried about scheduling fulfillment shifts, ordering boxes and shipping labels, and dealing with the extra headaches of running logistics. Most of all, those are hours we'd spend on tasks that are not scaling our business when we could be using those resources for growth.

You should spend time doing what you do best, and fulfillment is an easy task to take off your plate. Plus, we really couldn't do it ourselves. Our order volume has seen ebbs and flows, and ShipBob has fulfilled over 10,000 shipments per month for us.



Gerard Ecker
Founder & CEO of Ocean & Co.



Some 3PLs are even equipped to work with startups and small businesses by providing services that offer more flexibility while still giving access to their fulfillment infrastructure and advanced technology.



When I contacted a few 3PLs, I learned that many of them are not conducive to startups. There are minimums just to have an account, with fee after fee — \$50 for this, \$50 for that.

Once it all adds up, it comes out to be \$250 a month just for running costs, excluding storage, shipping, and more. ShipBob allows me to outsource fulfillment without worrying about monthly order minimums.



Lee Nania
Founder of SubSubmarine



Not every 3PL is going to be the best fit for your business, but the right 3PL should have the technology, infrastructure, support, and expertise to help you grow your business, no matter what stage of growth you're in and what challenges come your way.

Whether you choose ShipBob or another 3PL, we're still here to help you make an informed decision.

Why? Because we understand how much logistics can impact scalability, sales, reputation, and customer satisfaction, and it takes time to make sure you're choosing the right 3PL to partner with.

We know we're not going to be the best fit for everyone, but we have a lot of information we can share.

In this guide, you will learn the most important questions to ask a potential 3PL, plus tips and other things you should consider during your search, so you feel confident in choosing the right fulfillment partner for your business.

Note: You might be in a situation where you're unsatisfied with your current 3PL. If that's the case, [check out this guide on how to reduce risk when switching 3PLs.](#)



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Not All 3PLs Are Created Equal: How to Prepare

Courtney Lee is the founder of Prymal, a fast-growing ecommerce brand that sells a variety of sugar-free, non-dairy coffee creamer flavors.

During the beginning stages of her business, she chose to partner with a local fulfillment provider but soon ran into major challenges such as fulfillment errors and poor customer support.

Moving forward, she knew she needed to find a new 3PL that could offer peace of mind, intuitive technology, and more visibility into the fulfillment process, which would allow her to save on both fulfillment costs and time spent on logistics.

After exploring several fulfillment options, Courtney chose to partner with ShipBob. Ever since her transition, she's been able to save a substantial amount of money and her business has grown rapidly.

“With my prior 3PL I felt sidelined — emotionally and financially — because all I could think about was troubleshooting errors and reconciling with the high costs.

After switching to ShipBob, just four months later, we are reaching \$160,000 in monthly revenue — that's 300% growth. We're also saving \$8,000 per month in fulfillment costs.

Finding the right 3PL was the final component for me to start feeling comfortable scaling my business.



Courtney Lee
Founder of Prymal

Prymal

Outsourcing fulfillment is a no-brainer for many brands. The challenge is choosing the right 3PL that fits your brand's unique needs — and the options can seem endless.

It's important to find a 3PL you can trust to handle your inventory, provide a positive customer experience, and help you grow your business by saving you time and money along the way.

The following chapters will help you prepare for future conversations with potential 3PLs, filled with questions to ask and key things to consider during your search.

Are you ready to outsource fulfillment?

There is no “right” time that will be the same for every brand when it comes to outsourcing fulfillment, but there are signs to look out for. Here is a checklist to help you decide if you’re ready to partner with 3PL. If you checked off any of the following statements, then partnering with a 3PL could be worth the investment.

Check all that apply:

- I spend several hours a week packing boxes and shipping orders.
- I don’t want to fulfill orders myself.
- I’m running out of space to store my inventory.
- I need more time for strategic projects like marketing and product development.
- I don’t want to invest in distribution infrastructure (e.g., warehouses, forklifts, labor, etc.).

Qualifications that determine the right fit

Primal

During your initial conversations with different 3PLs, you might come across a few that are not able to work with you. Don’t get discouraged. Every 3PL has their own set of customer qualifications, such as:

- A maximum SKU count
- Monthly order minimums and maximums
- Product size and weight limitations
- Prohibited product materials
- Integrations they offer that match where you sell and certain features, services, or capabilities that they can or cannot provide

If you’re coming across challenges finding a 3PL that will fit within your budget, consider the following:

A) Are you able to work the costs of outsourced fulfillment into your budget? It might not come until you hit a certain volume.

B) Product pricing tactics such as selling bundles, increasing product price, and offering minimum spend thresholds in exchange for free shipping, should be considered.

Also keep in mind that every 3PL is different, especially when it comes to following:

- Pricing model and fees
- How many customers they have and their capacity to take on more
- The order volume they can handle per customer
- Different warehouse locations and the total number of them (e.g., some only have local or nationwide locations while others have an international network)

What questions will the 3PL ask me?

To determine a mutual fit, a 3PL will also ask you questions about your business and your needs. It (hopefully) should not be an overwhelming process (i.e., no lengthy and confusing questionnaires), but just the info they need from you to ship products the most strategic way.

To prepare going into the conversation ahead of time, be ready to have answers to questions related to:

1. Product weights and dimensions
2. Current monthly order volume
3. Business projections based on marketing plans, product launches, PR initiatives, and markets that you plan to enter or expand into
4. Where your customers are located (by zip code) — this allows a 3PL to determine which fulfillment location(s) you should store in inventory in (often easily exportable from your online store)
5. Average number of items per order and common order combinations
6. Total number of SKUs
7. The technology you use (ecommerce platform at minimum)

Some 3PLs might even ask about average order value and have other questions that will help them advise you on maximizing sales, reducing costs and cart abandonment, and optimizing your supply chain.

This is a good sign of a trustworthy 3PL that thinks through business strategy and is looking for a long-term partnership. The more data and info you share, the more a 3PL is equipped to help you and offer ways to streamline your fulfillment strategy.

Keep in mind that the larger and more experienced the 3PL, the more insights and knowledge they have from working with thousands of brands across industries.

What It Means to Be a Modern 3PL

When outsourcing fulfillment, it's important to look for a solution that goes beyond the traditional pick, pack, and ship model. This means that, instead of only facilitating one isolated part of the fulfillment process, the 3PL coordinates with all aspects of the supply chain using technology and automation.

This modern approach to fulfillment can help your business make more informed decisions about your supply chain (from which locations to store inventory in, to how much inventory to order in a given time period) and ultimately provide your customers with an exceptional experience.

Of course, it's important not to focus solely on technology and automation. A modern, tech-enabled 3PL should offer a blend of both tech-enabled services as well as industry-leading solutions that help strengthen your business.

For instance, a 3PL that owns their entire tech stack has the ability to be more agile by having full control over implementing necessary and continuous improvements, while operating fulfillment centers themselves.

At the end of the day, your company's goal is to efficiently produce, sell, and ship the products that your customers want, when they want them. This goal is at odds with a supply chain that doesn't use sales and fulfillment data to inform production, and vice versa. You need a solution that is flexible, transparent, and puts customer demand first.

“We found a fulfillment center within a 5-mile radius of our manufacturer, which seemed convenient at the time. Turns out they couldn't meet our needs. It was a very basic warehousing and shipping operation, where inventory tracking was all done manually. They couldn't handle our order volume whatsoever, which is why we're now with ShipBob.”



Sarah Ribner
Co-Founder of PiperWai



What is a modern 3PL?

A modern fulfillment solution should be using the latest advancements in fulfillment technology and integrate with the systems you use.

This provides actionable ecommerce data to automate the fulfillment and shipping process, and make your supply chain more responsive.

Bottom line, today's modern 3PL should offer you a growing and agile fulfillment solution, best-in-class technology, and support to help you stay competitive, and save time and money as you grow your business.

In the following chapters, we'll cover what to expect from a modern 3PL, including the use of innovative technology, access to data and analytics, global logistics capabilities, and other value-added services and solutions that streamline the fulfillment experience for both you and your customers.

Understanding How Each 3PL's Technology Works

One of the most important elements of choosing a fulfillment solution is finding technology that works not just for you but with you. To keep up with customer expectations (from order tracking, to fast and affordable shipping), fulfillment technology is becoming more advanced, which makes a 3PL's technology a key differentiator.

There are three main technological elements to look for:

1. How the 3PL's technology will connect to your online store(s)
2. How the 3PL's software provides data and analytics
3. How a 3PL ensures accuracy and consistency across their fulfillment network

A tech-enabled 3PL is a technology company that offers shipping and fulfillment solutions for ecommerce businesses. In addition to traditional fulfillment services, such as warehousing, picking, packing, and shipping, the 3PL's technology helps with everything from order and inventory management to bundling products and managing returns.

A tech-enabled 3PL integrates data from multiple sources to give complete visibility into the lifecycle of an order. This data is sent to their fulfillment centers, which send critical information back to the merchant that can be accessed from an online dashboard.

This overlap of technology and logistics allows room for growth, including the ability to distribute inventory and expand into new locations and markets (more on that later).

To be considered a modern tech-enabled 3PL, a fulfillment provider should create and manage their fulfillment technology themselves, including the warehouse management system used in their fulfillment centers, in order to maintain consistency across their entire fulfillment network, as well as be agile enough to implement real-time customer feedback.



With our old fulfillment solution, because of a lack of ownership of the entire fulfillment stack, it was difficult to rectify or identify issues, unlike with ShipBob who owns the entire stack: inventory and order management system, warehouse management system, and their fulfillment centers.



Gerard Ecker
Founder & CEO of Ocean & Co.



Connecting your online store(s)

Rather than manually sending orders to your 3PL before their shipping deadline each day — risking potential delays, data entry errors, and missed orders — look for a 3PL whose technology integrates with your online store(s). This means that orders are automatically sent from your ecommerce store to your fulfillment provider's software.

Most 3PLs will have integrations with platforms like Shopify and will enable a two-way flow of data. If you sell on multiple sales channels, make sure they can integrate with all of those stores and serve as a source of truth for inventory and orders across channels. This reduces the risk of producing inconsistent data, duplicating SKUs or orders, and over- or under-counting inventory levels.

If your brand's backend is highly custom or you've built your own ecommerce store, you might need a more customizable fulfillment solution. If that's the case, some 3PLs also offer a [Developer API](#), which provides you the option to custom build an integration into their technology.

Integrations with other solutions

A key benefit of partnering with a tech-enabled 3PL is the ability to integrate fulfillment easily into your existing or future tech stack — beyond your online store. When evaluating 3PLs, you will want to consider what integrations and apps are available for solutions such as inventory management, order management, returns, packaging, and more.

However, you don't need to use several disparate tools to complete your fulfillment strategy; a 3PL's technology should provide

you with everything you need, such as all-in-one order and inventory management software, analytics tools, picking and packing services, inventory storage, automated order tracking, and more.

But as your business grows, your needs might change. Partnering with a tech-enabled 3PL will give you peace of mind, knowing that they offer endless solutions to further optimize your supply chain as you scale. Be sure to check out their partner network.

Shipping options

An important part of the integration between systems is mapping shipping options from your shopping cart to the shipping options the 3PL uses. The 3PL's technology should be able to automatically select the best shipping route, carrier, service, and even fulfillment center that has available inventory and can ship each order to your customer in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

3PLs can offer different combinations of standard and expedited shipping for both domestic and international destinations, and work with both major global carriers and even regional carriers to optimize the last mile.

Customer communication

A 3PL's technology can automatically keep customers updated on their packages.

Once an order has been shipped, the 3PL's software should be able to automatically send confirmation back to your ecommerce platform, which in turn can forward tracking updates to your customers. If customers ask you questions about their orders, you can quickly and confidently answer them with the most up-to-date information.

Providing data

A tech-enabled 3PL should provide you with data that can help you identify trends, spot bottlenecks, and track fulfillment performance to better manage inventory, meet customer demand, and save money and time on shipping — not just by manually sending you reports but having this information available on-demand in their dashboard.

Knowing the type of data the 3PL's platform captures can help you understand the type of analytics and insights you can gain from it.

It's important to track key fulfillment metrics, such as your inventory turnover rate, average shipping zone, order volume over time, number of items per order, average transit time, and other KPIs that impact overall logistics costs, inventory accounting, and customer satisfaction.

A 3PL's analytics or reporting tool should provide insights into common ecommerce logistics questions such as:

- Which states do I ship the most orders to?
- Which orders haven't been delivered yet?
- How much inventory do I currently have on hand at each fulfillment center?
- What were my historical stock levels at any point in time in any location?
- How many days do I have left until a SKU will be out of stock?
- By when do I need to reorder inventory for each product?
- What is the average cart value and shipping cost by shipping method?
- How much money would I save on shipping if I changed the fulfillment center locations my inventory is in?
- And much more



We strive to be very data-driven, and ShipBob gives us access to different views of our business. Their analytics tool has been great to have. We can see inventory reconciliations and easily view SKU velocity, transit times, and inventory distribution recommendations.



Pablo Gabatto
Business Operations Manager at Ample Foods

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Consistency and accuracy

To maintain consistency and accuracy of services across their entire fulfillment network, 3PLs need the right technology, processes, and repeatability of operations at scale.

Reliable & efficient operations

3PLs need to be experts in storing inventory and shipping orders in a secure, consistent, and timely manner. To do this, they should use a combination of hardware, equipment, automation, software, and processes that hold them to their service level agreements (SLAs).

Some 3PLs like ShipBob use Cubiscan machines and box selection algorithms to help ensure consistency in fulfillment costs by calculating the ideal package size for a given order combination. Cubiscan machines determine the right sized box depending on the dimensions and weights of the products that are to be shipped as well as your pre-set packaging preferences. This gives the 3PL insight into the best packaging to use while reducing dimensional weight.

Above all else, a 3PL should always focus on becoming more efficient over time by improving their warehouse operations through optimized picking routes, storing products that are often ordered together near each other, and finding ways to speed up processes without compromising quality.



Order accuracy

By utilizing technology to give you more control over how you want your products to be fulfilled, a 3PL should be able to improve accuracy in picking, packing, and shipping. For instance, 3PLs like ShipBob offer the following safeguards to reduce the possibility of an error or an order going out wrong:

- Use proprietary technology in their warehouses including wearable devices to scan each item as they move through each stage of the fulfillment process for an entire timeline of each order.
- Allow you to upload photos and/or videos of your products for their staff to see.
- Require digital verifications for fulfillment associates each time an item is picked or packed.
- Enable you to add barcodes, tariff codes for international orders, rules, and other features that help increase accuracy.
- Give you the control to edit or cancel orders after they've been placed, update addresses, and correct any mistakes a customer may have made at checkout.
- Let you set packaging preferences at the SKU level, and other types of product info.
- Provide deep insight into fulfillment performance and SLAs, visibility into order status and inventory counts, and other data points, allowing you to troubleshoot and keep a close eye on everything from afar.

Choosing fulfillment center location(s) wisely

A common mistake brands make when outsourcing fulfillment for the first time is choosing a warehouse because it's near them.

Instead, they should consider a starting location that will reduce their average shipping cost and transit time to reach the majority of customers most efficiently.

Online shoppers today expect affordable and fast deliveries. If your shipping options don't meet customer expectations, it can significantly increase your cart abandonment rate (and even repeat purchase rate).

The fulfillment center location(s) you choose to store inventory in can make or break your ability to deliver (and your bottom line), as it should be a decision based on data and proximity to your customers, not just you.

“We had a local fulfillment partner that could serve the Northeast reasonably well and made sense during our first couple of years before sales really took off. As we started to hit that first inflection point of growth, it became apparent we needed to look for a 3PL that could help us expand geographically in the US and also drive down shipping costs and expenses. Since switching to ShipBob from our previous 3PL, our fulfillment cost on comparable orders went down by 25%.”



Michael Peters
VP of E-Commerce
Operations at TB12



Understanding shipping zones

First and foremost, you need to understand how fulfillment centers located close to your customers can reduce both the distance most orders have to travel and the average shipping zones you ship to (and thus, costs), a key part of any fulfillment strategy.

[Shipping zones](#) are the geographical areas that carriers ship to, spanning from Zone 1 to Zone 8 for domestic shipments in the contiguous United States, measured in groupings of zip codes.

The location from which an order is shipped is the point of origin and located in Zone 1.

The address it's shipped to is the destination zone, which will depend on how far it is from the point of origin, with Zone 8 being the farthest away.

If a package is sent from a fulfillment center that is also near your customer's shipping destination (e.g., Zone 1 or 2), it will almost always arrive in fewer days than a package sent to a higher zone (like 7 or 8) and be much cheaper.

For this reason, working with a 3PL that has fulfillment centers in different regions of the country (that you can always grow into over time) can be vital to making sure your customers' expectations are met through affordable, timely shipping.

If fulfillment centers are only located on a coast, or in rural locations, you won't be able to create a truly strategic geographic footprint.

Distributing inventory

3PLs have relationships with shipping carriers that allow them to negotiate discounted rates for their clients; however, the biggest cost savings for affordable shipping come from distributing your inventory across their fulfillment centers.

Distributed inventory is the ability to store inventory in multiple fulfillment centers so you can ship each order out from the warehouse that is closest to your customer, which is done using algorithms that route each order to the optimal location.

If your customers are geographically distributed across the country, and analyzing the numbers determines cost savings, you will likely want to split your inventory across multiple locations.

This helps speed up standard shipping (e.g., to offer two-day shipping via ground for customers in those surrounding areas) instead of only offering costly expedited air shipping.

Distributing inventory won't be cost-effective for everyone from the start, especially if products are light in weight (i.e., under one pound) or if you don't have a high volume of shipments yet.

But as your online business grows, having a network of fulfillment centers can help you efficiently reach more customers, and a good 3PL will provide this data to you.

Splitting inventory across warehouses can also help you be prepared in the event that your orders can't leave a particular fulfillment center (e.g., in extreme weather events) that prevent a carrier from picking up in one location, or in the event of a building closure like we saw happen to many unprepared

3PLs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, you will have backup stock if you run out in one facility.



We want the customer experience of purchasing on our website to be similar to Amazon Prime. This is possible with ShipBob, without inflating the shipping cost to an insane level. To do this, we strategically place products around the country. We are storing inventory in three of ShipBob's fulfillment centers. These locations map out nicely with our customer base as we have a large group in the South and also get coverage on the West Coast and in the Midwest.



Tim Fink
Co-Founder of
EnduroSport



International fulfillment capabilities

Another mistake more mature brands end up regretting is using separate 3PLs in each country they scale into and having different logins to 3PL systems, support teams, SLAs, processes, and other inconsistencies when managing separate 3PL partners.

Depending on your growth plans, you might want to choose a 3PL that not only ships internationally but also offers fulfillment locations in different countries.

Shipping internationally can be expensive and transit times are significantly slower. Not to mention, dealing with taxes and import duties every time you ship a single order to an end customer can be a headache.

Partnering with a 3PL that offers both domestic and international fulfillment capabilities can solve many of the common challenges of international shipping.

Instead of shipping every order across borders, you can bulk ship inventory to an international location so orders can be shipped within the country (or, for example, within the EU). This process makes it much easier to expand globally while reducing the international shipping risks and costs.



“With ShipBob, I’m able to offer competitive shipping rates within the US and move more units than I would shipping from Australia with ridiculous postage prices.



Lee Nania
Founder of SubSubmarine



Best of all, you can manage inventory and orders that are being fulfilled across the globe from the same dashboard as your domestic shipments, working with the same support team, and having a simplified, consistent experience.

“When I found out ShipBob was expanding into both Canada and Europe, I knew we wanted to expand our physical footprint with them. This would offer us the ability to reduce taxes and tariffs that come with international shipping. Now, Canadian-based orders will see a large reduction in shipping costs.



Nikolai Paloni
Co-founder of Ombraz



Other Considerations When Sourcing a 3PL

While agile fulfillment, innovative technology, and a global footprint are all vital criteria for choosing a fulfillment provider, there are a variety of other services you may want or need from a 3PL, ranging from customization to returns processing.

Here are things to keep in mind during your search, as well as additional considerations and questions to ask.

Stay organized during your search

To stay organized, you might want to create a list of the “must-haves” such as services, technology, warehouse locations, and pricing.

You will also want to come up with a way to help you keep track of the pros and cons and services of each 3PL, such as a scorecard or a comparison table.

“We started to look around for fulfillment companies, so I created a scorecard to compare prospects.

We evaluated many 3PL options for several months. We need to deliver quickly and inexpensively.

Ever since we started our partnership with ShipBob in the summer of 2018, they’ve been able to deliver the customer service level we need at the right cost.



Michael Peters
VP of E-Commerce
Operations at TB12



“When I was evaluating 3PLs, there were two must-haves I was looking for. First, they had to work with other brands that are larger than mine. Second, they had to be trustworthy, and I’m willing to pay extra to make sure the people I’m partnering with are ones I trust. ShipBob was the perfect fit.



Tracey Wallace
Founder of Doris Sleep

Doris

You get what you pay for

Another thing to keep note of is that the cheapest option isn’t always the best option. Be cautious of tradeoffs for the lowest cost option, and closely compare apples to apples. Ask yourself:

- What am I getting for this price?
- Which services are most important for me?
- How much support will I get?

“We are willing to pay a premium for a premium product. While many 3PLs utilize a complex pricing model that makes forecasting expenses nearly impossible, ShipBob has a clear pricing model so we know exactly what we’re going to be billed.



Gerard Ecker
Founder & CEO of Ocean & Co.



Additional questions to ask

If you're looking for a long-term partnership with a 3PL that has a good track record ...

1. How do I know your company will be around in 5 years?
2. Is your company backed by investors/have access to capital?
3. How many customers do you have? How many did you have a year ago?
4. How many employees do you have?
5. Do you have any case studies I can read?

If you would like to split inventory across fulfillment centers ...

1. Where are your fulfillment centers located?
2. Do you let me choose the fulfillment center location(s) I'm in?
3. How do I know which fulfillment center location I should choose?
4. Does every fulfillment location have a unified process and dimensions for storage?
5. Is there a consistent experience across all locations?

If you have or want customers across the globe ...

1. Do you ship internationally?
2. Do you have fulfillment centers in other countries?
3. How can I track international orders?
4. Which international carriers do you work with?

If you want good customer support ...

1. What hours is your Customer Support team available?
2. What is the best way to contact your Customer Support team?
3. Will I have a dedicated Account Manager?

“ShipBob has been a great partner for us. I like that I can always get someone on the phone or to respond to emails right away.”

We can completely outsource storage and fulfillment for DTC channels with only having to spend a max of 4-5 hours per week on small tasks like canceling orders for customers.

We would 100% not be where we are today without having a great 3PL partner for our DTC business.



Vincent Bradley
CEO & Co-Founder
of Proper Wild

Proper wILD

If you are shipping subscription boxes ...

1. Do you offer services for recurring orders and/or curated boxes with items from different brands?
2. How will you make sure my box is shipped to subscribers at the same time each month, quarter, etc.?
3. How does your software handle recurring orders?

If you want your branding to shine ...

1. Do you use plain, standard packaging?
2. Can I use custom boxes, mailers, or inserts for my orders?
3. Do you have partners you recommend for branded packaging?
4. Do you offer kitting of orders, or will boxes have to be assembled before they are sent to your warehouse?

If you are trying to calculate costs or see if their pricing plan is easy to understand...

1. What factors go into pricing?
2. What are all the potential fees I will be charged (both variable and fixed)?
3. Do I have to pay for standard packaging materials and boxes, each pick, etc.?
4. Do you use dimensional weight in shipping calculations?
5. How often am I billed and what type of invoice breakdowns do you provide?
6. Do I have to sign a long-term contract?
7. What is the all-in cost (not just shipping but every fee that adds up)? Note: You may have to calculate this yourself, as some 3PLs make it difficult to do so.

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ShipBob was by far the easiest, most reasonably priced option with the nicest, most genuine people. Other 3PLs gave me confusing pricing with many per-item fees, which were hard to grasp and calculate ultimate costs.



Greg MacDonald
CEO, Bathorium

**If you are wondering how to send inventory to the fulfillment center ...**

1. What is the process for sending inventory and what happens if I don't follow it?
2. How long does it take to receive inventory and how much does it cost?
3. How do I schedule a dock appointment?
4. Can I bring my inventory to you myself?
5. My inventory is manufactured overseas — how do I book international freight? Can you help me book freight shipping?
6. What's the maximum amount I can ship?

If you want to offer returns ...

1. What are my options for processing returns and what can you do with them?
2. Do I have to go through you for returns?
3. Where should my customers send returns?
4. Which returns management platforms do you integrate with?

If you are ready to get started now ...

1. When is the soonest I can get started?
2. How long does onboarding take?
3. What are the most common mistakes new customers make and advice you have?
4. Are there any minimums?
5. How do I connect my online store(s)?
6. How long does it take to sync and send my inventory?
7. Are there any onboarding or sign-up fees?

Choosing the Right 3PL Is Worth It

If your ecommerce business is ready to outsource fulfillment, choosing the right 3PL can help you save time and money.

Finding a partner that will support you for the long term can take time — but the effort is worth it. Before going into conversations with different 3PLs, be sure to plan ahead in terms of future growth goals and how you will scale your business.

This will help you determine which 3PL is right for you earlier than not. It can be a pain to switch 3PLs as you grow, so it's worth getting it right the first time around. When it comes to your fulfillment strategy — always prepare for the future.

We hope this guide helps you choose a fulfillment partner that meets your brand's unique needs, provides a positive experience to your customers, and ultimately helps you grow.

Of course, depending on your business model, product(s), location, and customer base, you might have additional questions or needs — this is just a list to get the conversation started. Overall, it's vital to find a partner that's a mutual fit.

Keep scrolling to learn more about ShipBob's fulfillment solution or [hear from more customers that choose ShipBob as their 3PL.](#)



Partner with ShipBob

ShipBob is a tech-enabled 3PL that offers simple, fast, and affordable fulfillment for thousands of ecommerce businesses. With deep logistics expertise, integrated technology, built-in data and analytics, best-in-class support, easy-to-understand pricing, and a network of fulfillment centers across the globe (with new locations continuously underway), ShipBob lets you split inventory across our network to reduce shipping costs and transit times. We even have a plan for startups [here](#).

Visit ShipBob.com to learn more or to [request a pricing quote](#).



“ShipBob offered more flexibility than other 3PLs. They have been a great partner as we’ve grown. They are dedicated to transparency, and are really committed to their customers and keeping themselves accountable.”

Pablo Gabatto
Business Operations Manager at Ample Foods