



How to Find the Right 3PL to Scale Your Business

Unlock scalable success by choosing the right fulfillment partner.

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Welcome to Our E-Book About How to Find the Right Third-Party Logistics (3PLs) Provider!

Congratulations! You've built your merchant business to the point that you're spending many hours per week filling orders and not enough time setting yourself up for the next stage. While this is a good problem to have, it's time to make a move before your business suffers.

If you're a small to medium sized business owner and this resonates with your experience, we hope this guide helps you determine whether your business is ready for a third-party logistics (3PL) partner. You will gain insider knowledge about how to choose the right 3PL to scale your business (and what to avoid in a 3PL), what services to look for in a 3PL, and an understanding of why G10 might be the right fit for your business. You will also walk away with your questions answered about how a 3PL can help take your business to the next level.



As the Director of Business Development & Customer Success at G10, my focus is ensuring that we manage our clients' logistics in a way that drives growth, profitability, and efficiency across their entire organization. If after reading through this e-book, you think G10 may be the right fulfillment partner to unlock scalable success for your business, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at MBradbury@G10Fulfillment.com.

Sincerely,

Matt Bradbury
Director of Sales

The Growing Pains of Doing It All Yourself

If you've been steadily growing your business from the ground up, you may be exhausted from wearing every hat from order fulfillment to marketing, customer service, and bookkeeping. If your seller business is on an upward trajectory, your orders are increasing, inventory is taking over your space, and you have been spending more time packing boxes lately than building your brand. While these are great problems to have, they're also red flags that your current fulfillment setup could be holding you back.

Here are 5 signs you're outgrowing your warehouse facility:

- You're spending more time packing than strategizing.
- Inventory is cluttering your home or storage space.
- Shipping delays are becoming more frequent.
- It's hard to keep up with order volume during sales or peak seasons.
- Customer service issues are increasing due to fulfillment mistakes.



How in-house fulfillment can slow down growth

While in-house order fulfillment and inventory tracking is typically necessary and cost-effective in the early stages, it can quickly become an overwhelming burden that prevents your business from growing because you don't have time to respond to new opportunities. That's where the opportunity cost comes in.



-Matt Bradbury

Every hour you spend managing logistics is an hour you're not marketing, innovating, or building relationships with customers and partners. By outsourcing fulfillment to experts, you free up time, improve order and inventory accuracy, and gain a scalable logistics solution built for growth.

What is a 3PL and Why Does It Matter?

What a 3PL does (and doesn't do)

Third-party logistics (3PL) providers are an essential part of the supply chain. They provide a full range of services including warehousing and inventory management, order fulfillment, packaging and shipping, transportation, and exchange/returns processing. Conversely, a 3PL doesn't typically handle core business functions like product development, financial planning, marketing strategy, or customer service inquiries unless they are related to shipping or product returns. Learn more about [what a 3PL does](#).

The differences between in-house fulfillment, 3PL & 4PL

In-House

When a business owner chooses "in-house fulfillment" to handle their logistics needs, it means they are managing their own storage, inventory, and shipping without relying on a third-party provider. This approach gives full control of every step of the fulfillment process to the business owner, which can support a strong customer experience if handled well, but it also requires significant time, space, and resources that could otherwise be used to grow the business.

3PL

A 3PL is a hands-on logistics partner that manages the logistics for a business' products, including warehousing, inventory management, and order fulfillment. Businesses that work with 3PLs maintain a fair amount of direct oversight and visibility into who is handling their goods, which allows for some control over customer experience, without having to manage day-to-day logistics tasks.

4PL

When businesses work with a 4PL, they outsource their entire supply chain management and logistics to one external service provider. Most 4PLs do not own or lease assets, instead coordinating transportation, warehousing, and shipping services with other logistics companies including 3PLs. Fourth-party logistics providers are best suited to large enterprises with global or multi-regional operations.

How a 3PL can help you scale faster and smarter

By outsourcing logistics operations, companies can reduce overhead, improve delivery times, and focus more on growth and customer experience. Many business owners are hesitant to partner with a 3PL because they think a 3PL will add to their costs, but a 3PL can often save merchants money because of:

- **Improved efficiency that leads to faster shipping**
- **Lower overhead costs (no need to lease your own warehouse)**
- **Reduced labor costs (no need to hire warehouse staff)**
- **Better inventory management**
- **Reduced seller fees**
- **Volume-based shipping rates**
- **Fewer order fulfillment errors**

Is Your Business Ready for a 3PL?

Use this checklist to identify whether you are ready to outsource logistics:

Order Volume & Growth

- ☐ My order volume has outgrown my current space and/or staffing capacity
- ☐ I'm spending more time packing boxes than growing my business
- ☐ I've missed or delayed orders due to volume spikes or lack of systems
- ☐ I want to scale, but fulfillment is holding me back

Time & Efficiency

- ☐ I'm overwhelmed by the time spent on picking, packing, and shipping
- ☐ Managing returns and customer service is becoming unmanageable
- ☐ I lack the technology or systems to efficiently track inventory
- ☐ My day-to-day operations prevent me from focusing on product development, marketing, or sales

Strategy & Expertise

- ☐ I'm not sure how to improve my current fulfillment process
- ☐ I've outgrown manual tracking methods like spreadsheets
- ☐ I'd benefit from industry expertise and logistics strategy

Cost & Overhead

- ☐ Warehousing or labor costs are becoming too high to manage alone
- ☐ I'm considering leasing or expanding warehouse space
- ☐ I'm unsure how to budget for future growth without fulfillment support

Reach & Customer Expectations

- I want to expand my reach to new markets or sales channels
- Customers are expecting faster shipping and I'm struggling to meet their expectations
- I want to explore same-day shipping, retail readiness, or hazmat compliance

If you checked 5 or more boxes, you're likely ready to explore working with a 3PL.



Key Metrics and Data to Know Before You Reach Out

When e-commerce businesses hit specific benchmarks - such as a certain order volume or number of SKUs - they have hit what we call "the turning point" where it may be time to outsource logistics so the business can continue growing. One of the most important metrics to consider is whether you are consistently above 500 orders per month. Other key metrics include number of SKUs, shipping costs, and employee costs (see full list below).

As you gather these key metrics, think of it as a logistics "gut check" to see if your business is ready to outsource fulfillment.

What information you'll need to provide to potential 3PL partners

Before reaching out to a third-party logistics (3PL) provider, it is important to gather relevant data that a 3PL will use to determine if your business is a good fit. This information will also help the 3PL create an accurate fulfillment plan and pricing model, should you decide to work together

Here are the key metrics you will need to provide a potential 3PL partner:

- Average monthly order volume
- Total number of SKUs
- Inventory turnover rate
- Order destinations
- Current shipping costs (domestic and international, if applicable)
- Shipping SLAs (service level agreements for 1-day, 2-day, standard shipping, etc.)
- Fulfillment error rate and return rate
- Average order value and item size/weight
- Product types (Hazmat, meltable, breakable, electronic, etc.)
- Packaging requirements (kitting, fragile items, custom packaging, etc.)
- Monthly spend on full-time warehouse and fulfillment employees
- Seasonal order fluctuations or peak sales periods
- Technology platforms you use (Shopify, Amazon, inventory management software, etc.)
- Current warehousing setup (in-house vs. outsourced, location, square footage, etc.)



-Matt Bradbury

Having this data ready will make it easier to have conversations with potential 3PLs to help ensure you find the right partner to scale your business.

How to Choose the Right 3PL Partner

Top 10 Questions to Ask When Interviewing a 3PL:

Q What services do you offer beyond basic pick, pack, and ship?

A *Look For:* Kitting, bundling, custom packaging, FBA prep, hazmat handling, B2B capabilities, and value-added services.

Q What technology or warehouse management system (WMS) do you use, and how does it integrate with my sales platforms?

A *Look For:* Real-time inventory tracking, integration with Amazon, Shopify, BigCommerce, etc., and reporting features.

Q Do you provide a dedicated account manager or personalized support?

A *Look For:* Access to a real person, not just a ticketing system, and proactive communication.

Q Where are your warehouse locations, and how do they support fast, cost-effective shipping?

A *Look For:* Strategically located facilities that reduce shipping zones and offer same-day or 2-day options.

Q What industries or product types do you specialize in?

A *Look For:* Experience handling products similar to yours (e.g., apparel, electronics, hazmat, or B2B retail fulfillment).

Q Can you handle scaling — both peak seasons and long-term growth?

A *Look For:* Evidence they can grow with you (capacity, staffing, systems) and handle Q4 spikes or flash sales.

Q What is your pricing structure and are there any hidden fees?

A *Look For:* Clear, transparent pricing for storage, receiving, pick/pack, shipping, and account support — ask for a sample invoice!

Q Can you provide references or case studies from businesses similar to mine?

A *Look For:* Social proof, testimonials, or examples of success stories that reflect your business goals

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Red flags to watch for

Not all 3PLs are created equal. The right 3PL will help your business scale efficiently, while the wrong one will hurt your business with slow shipping, poor customer service, and inventory headaches. When deciding which 3PL to partner with, it's important to watch out for the following 3PL red flags:



Cannot integrate with your order processing system (lack of EDI integration).

This creates operational inefficiencies, reduces productivity, and hampers the ability to scale.



Lack of automation or outdated technology.

Traditional paper-based processes are no longer sufficient to keep up with the demands of modern supply chains. For example, it's important to choose a 3PL with a robust Warehouse Management System (WMS) and Warehouse Control System (WCS) for inventory management.



Too rigid or inexperienced.

Do not sign with a 3PL that is unable to create a fulfillment plan that will meet your current and future needs as your business grows.



Frequent stockouts or inventory overflow.

If a 3PL regularly has too little or too much inventory to fulfill their customers' orders, it's an indication that they do not have an accurate inventory management system and your business will suffer.



High error rates.

A 3PL that frequently mislabels packages, makes inventory tracking errors, or shipping mistakes will harm your business.



Disorganized warehouse.

A messy and disorganized warehouse is a safety hazard and can be a sign of poor inventory management practices that will harm your business.



High employee turnover.

A high turnover rate can indicate that the company is not taking care of its employees, which leads to low effort, instability and a lack of experienced workers to handle your logistics.



Lack of transparency.

Your 3PL should be able to provide real-time tracking and inventory updates, and be open with you about any issues that arise



Red flags Cont.



Only one or a few warehouse locations.

If you have customers around the country and/or in international markets, it is a strategic advantage to partner with a 3PL with warehouses across the country as this can shorten shipping times and reduce risk.



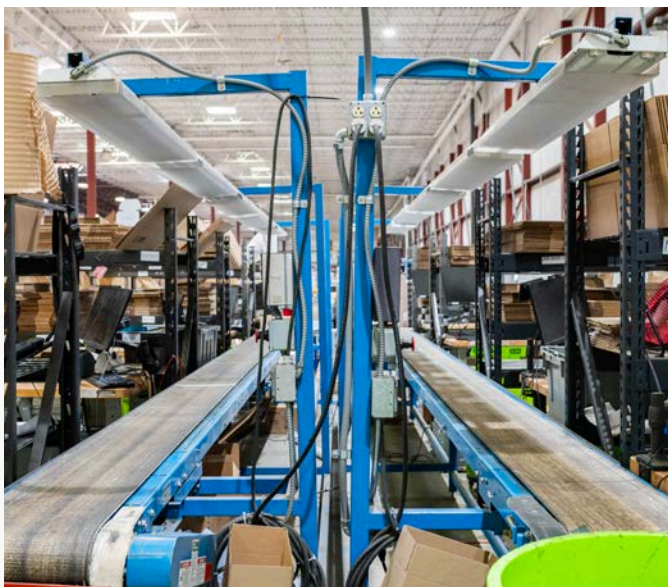
Does not have the correct certifications to ship Hazmat products.

Shipping Hazmat products illegally can lead to fines, penalties and safety and environmental disasters.



Overpromising on capabilities or performance.

When a 3PL overpromises, clients may be stung by unexpected fees or surcharges, mismanaged inventory, and slow shipping times, leading to disgruntled customers.



Required to submit a service ticket to get support.

Choose a 3PL with a customer service team you can reach quickly by phone or email.



Poor communication.

Your 3PL should be able to provide real-time tracking and inventory updates, and be open with you about any issues that arise



Vague pricing and a general lack of detail in the proposal.

When a proposal is vague, clients are often left with unpleasant surprises down the road such as unexpected expenses or inconsistent invoicing.



Poor reviews.

When a 3PL has poor online reviews or they refuse to share references, it can be a sign that they are not a reliable business.



Customer service team is outsourced to another company.

An outsourced team is not likely to be as invested in or capable of caring for your needs.



Logistics are outsourced.

This one is a yellow flag as 4PLs outsource logistics, which may be suited to businesses looking to have less control of operations.

How to compare pricing, capabilities, and service levels

One of the decisions that a merchant business will need to make when selecting a third-party logistics provider, is what size 3PL will best meet their needs. While small regional 3PLs offer personalized service, they often lack the scalability, robust integrations, and automation tools of more advanced providers. On the other end of the spectrum, mass-market 3PLs offer vast resources and scale but may fall short on flexibility, customization, and personal support. Mid-size national 3PLs like G10 aim to bridge this gap by offering the advanced infrastructure of larger providers with the agility and personal attention typical of smaller logistics partners.

Category	Regional (Small) 3PL	National (Mid-Size) 3PL	Mass-Market (Large) 3PL
Pricing Model	Manual quotes, inconsistent pricing	Transparent, tiered or volume-based pricing	Standardized rates, potentially negotiable at scale
Monthly Minimums	Low or none	Moderate, scalable with business size	High—geared toward enterprise clients
Setup Fees	Often waived or minimal	Moderate (covers integrations, onboarding)	High, often includes tech and compliance setup
Technology Integration	Limited or manual integrations	Modern APIs, e-commerce platform integrations	Sophisticated systems, but less custom flexibility
Inventory Storage	Small-scale, limited warehouse space	Multi-location, optimized for speed and accuracy	Nationwide or global warehouses, bulk-focused
Order Fulfillment Speed	2-5 business days, with slower, more manual processes	1-2 business days, allows for Prime Shipping	Same day/1 day options, but may prioritize high-volume clients
Custom Packaging	Very limited	Available, often included in services	Rare, usually discouraged due to standardization
Returns Management	Basic and manual	Streamlined with tracking and reverse logistics	Standardized, can be impersonal or slow to adapt
Customer Support	Personal but not always available or consistent	Dedicated reps, responsive service teams	Generic support, ticket-based, less personalized
Analytics & Reporting	Spreadsheets or basic dashboards	Real-time dashboards, actionable insights	Advanced tools, but difficult to customize
Scalability	Limited to regional or local operations	High—built to grow with clients	Very high, but slower to adapt to client changes

Considerations for brands with unique needs

If your company has a particular need, look for a 3PL with expertise in that area. Choosing a provider that aligns with your business model can streamline operations and reduce costly mistakes. Here are key considerations for five common specialized fulfillment needs.

1. Hazmat (Hazardous Materials)

The government requires any business that ships and handles hazardous materials to be certified in hazmat shipping and storage. They are also required to have staff trained in compliance and safety protocols. If your business involves Hazmat, you will want to verify that the 3PL you hire is knowledgeable about DOT, OSHA, and carrier-specific regulations and follows all legal requirements for handling and shipping Hazmat to avoid fines or shipping delays.

3. Retail Compliance

Major retailers like Target, Walmart, and Costco require vendors to meet strict compliance rules, including specific labeling, packaging, and shipping methods. A common example of these requirements is Walmart's on-time-in-full (OTIF) program. You will want to choose a 3PL that has experience with retail compliance and is highly motivated to help you meet your retail compliance requirements.

5. Cold Storage

Perishable goods require temperature-controlled storage and shipping to maintain product integrity. If you sell perishable goods, look for a 3PL that has refrigerated warehousing, cold chain logistics experience, and follows FDA or USDA guidelines, if applicable. A 3PL with robust monitoring systems and temperature audits is also essential for businesses that sell perishable food, pharmaceuticals, or cosmetics.

2. B2B Fulfillment

Merchants that sell to other businesses have different needs than those selling to retail customers, including higher levels of documentation and shipment accuracy. B2B sellers should look for a 3PL that can handle bulk orders and palletized freight, and offers a robust Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) system. They should also have experience with purchase orders (POs) and managing strict delivery windows.

4. Kitting and Assembly

If you ship products with multiple components bundled together - such as subscription boxes or gift sets - you will need a 3PL skilled in kitting. Efficient kitting is important for reducing overhead costs and ensuring consistent brand presentation. The right 3PL will support custom packaging, barcode labeling, and quality control checks during assembly.



6. What to Look For in a 3PL: Capabilities that Drive Growth

If your company has a particular need, look for a 3PL with expertise in that area. Choosing a provider that aligns with your business model can streamline operations and reduce costly mistakes. Here are key considerations for five common specialized fulfillment needs.

Scalable Inventory storage

A scalable 3PL is vital for maintaining efficient fulfillment and customer satisfaction as your company grows, and that includes adequate inventory storage. A 3PL with ample storage capacity will be able to adapt alongside your business by adjusting quickly to fluctuations in customer demand. Specifically, storage capacity helps prevent inventory stockouts, especially during critical peak seasons and periods of rapid growth.

Cross-channel & EDI capabilities

Customizable integrations and seamless connectivity to major retailers including Amazon, Walmart, Shopify, Wayfair, and Target are an absolute must for multi-channel sellers because they ensure faster, more reliable order processing. EDI has also proven to be a game-changer for B2B sellers and large retail ecommerce businesses to scale their businesses and operate more efficiently.

Kitting, bundling & value-added services

When you choose a 3PL that offers kitting, bundling, and value-added services such as secure packaging, your business will be able to deliver a more customized and cohesive product experience to customers. Businesses also benefit from a tremendous savings in time and labor costs, because products no longer need to be bundled in-house.

Custom packaging and branding

If you are looking to elevate your brand with customization options, choose a 3PL that is willing to add branded materials to your packages and create custom engravings and embroidery for your products. When done well, custom packaging and branding enhances the unboxing experience and strengthens customer loyalty.

Pick, pack & ship speed and accuracy

Customers expect speedy delivery, which makes fast picking, packing, and shipping crucial for keeping them happy. The best way to ensure fast, accurate deliveries is to choose a 3PL that understands the importance of fast shipping, has quality control measures in place, and offers same-day fulfillment.

Technology & transparency: Why a solid WMS matters

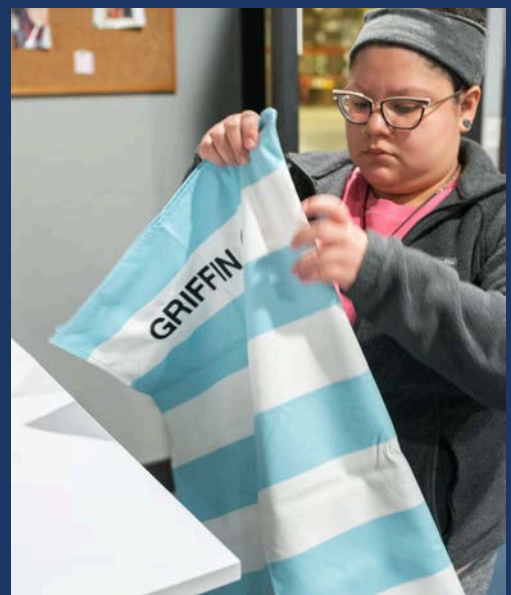
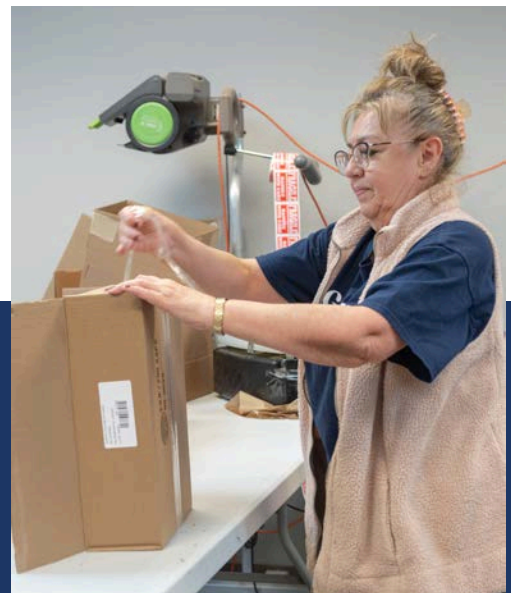
A solid Warehouse Management System (WMS) is crucial for your 3PL because it is the best way to guarantee accurate inventory tracking, efficient order processing, and real-time visibility into your stock. It also helps reduce fulfillment errors, integrates with your sales channels, improves shipping speed, and supports scalability as your business grows.

Retail and wholesale fulfillment

If you're a D2C seller business, a 3PL with excellent retail fulfillment services is essential for streamlining the delivery of your products to store shelves, optimizing your inventory management, and ensuring customer satisfaction.

Effective wholesale fulfillment is essential for B2B businesses, because it is the best way to scale operations and reach new markets without the need for additional infrastructure or resources.

Retail and wholesale fulfillment helps businesses save money, increase efficiency, and frees-up time to concentrate on core business functions that will support growth.



Why G10 Fulfillment Might Be the Right Fit

Who we are and what we do

G10 Fulfillment is a full-service logistics partner that supports B2B and D2C businesses by handling every aspect of their logistics needs. With over 30 years of industry expertise, G10 offers a network of strategically located warehouses, advanced technology, same-day shipping, and custom capabilities that help brands scale efficiently.

In addition, businesses that sell Hazmat have come to rely on G10 because of our commitment to following stringent laws and protocol to handle and ship their goods safely. Our advanced EDI solutions integrate seamlessly with major platforms like Amazon, Shopify, and Walmart, giving B2B sellers and large ecommerce retailers real-time visibility and control of their inventory. We also have a dedicated in-house customer service team and assigned account managers that work closely with each client to provide a smooth customer experience.



Our Facilities and Locations

Since our establishment in 2009, G10 Fulfillment has grown rapidly, starting from a 10,000-square-foot airplane hangar to now operating in six locations across the United States. We consider our commitment to adding more locations a strategic advantage for our clients, as it demonstrates our dedication to meeting the changing needs of our customers and allows for the fastest possible shipping.

- Delavan, Wisconsin (corporate headquarters)
- Wilmot, Wisconsin
- Sparks, Nevada
- Summerville, South Carolina
- Goodyear, Arizona
- Arlington, Texas



Our unique tech stack and real-time visibility

Efficient electronic communication in the logistics industry is critical to keep up with the demands of modern supply chains. G10 Fulfillment's investment in advanced technology, from our proprietary ChannelPoint™ system to advanced EDI integrations, improves speed and accuracy at every stage of the fulfillment process. ChannelPoint™ supports over 100 seamless integrations with popular seller platforms, creating efficient and automated order processing. This powerful platform automatically transmits orders, updates tracking information instantly, and keeps your operations running at peak efficiency. Our advanced analytics tools provide clients with real-time visibility into their inventory, orders, and overall logistics operations.

Personalized account management

At G10, we are committed to the customer experience. We have sworn off ticketing systems and outsourced customer service. Clients can always reach a member of our customer service team through phone or email or contact their dedicated account manager for personalized account management.



"At G10, we are committed to the customer experience. We have sworn off ticketing systems and outsourced customer service. Clients can always reach a member of our customer service team through phone or email or contact their dedicated account manager for personalized account management."

-Company Name



Connor Perkins
Director of Fulfillment

Preparing for a Smooth Transition

Connor's background in system integration and data management ensures new clients are quickly connected to G10's technology platforms, which establishes real-time visibility that reduces downtime. In addition, his focus on bridging operations and sales enhances communication during onboarding, aligning expectations and ensuring a more efficient, streamlined transition into G10's fulfillment systems.

What onboarding with a 3PL should look like

Onboarding should be a time where both teams strengthen the existing relationship and learn how to work cohesively to transition fulfillment responsibilities. In order to succeed, the onboarding process must be well thought out and guided by a detailed project plan to ensure key milestones are met by the expected delivery dates. During onboarding, the client's online stores will be integrated with the 3PL system to sync orders and inventory and testing should be completed to ensure the integration is working correctly and that order data has been transmitted accurately.

Key areas to focus on during onboarding:



1. Product setup



2. Packaging expectations



3. Shipping preferences



4. Inventory management strategies such as reorder points



We Treat Your Business As Our Own

"When you partner with G10, you gain a committed team that treats your business as their own. It's a true partnership, built on trust and shared purpose."

What clients appreciate about onboarding with G10

We have received a lot of great feedback about the G10 onboarding process from our clients. Connor shared, “Clients appreciate our tested approach and detailed project plans. G10 provides an experienced, personable, and dedicated support team that is there to meet clients’ needs during the transition. The level of customer service we provide is a major key to making this process smooth and enjoyable.”

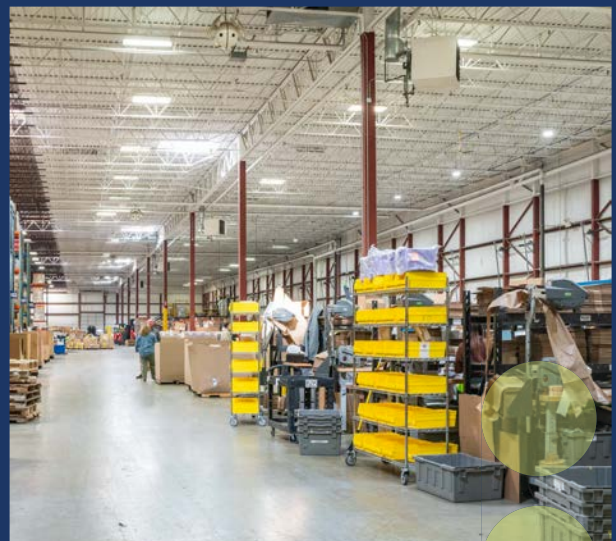


What we need from clients to start the transition and how G10 guides the process

There are several pieces of important information that we need to start the transition, including item data, barcode information, SDS sheets, inbound and outbound volume, and an understanding of the key stakeholders. G10 provides onboarding plans and maps tailor-made to the customers business, which serve to guide the onboarding process from the start and track progress to ensure a smooth and timely transition.

Tips for ensuring fulfillment continuity during the handoff

To ensure fulfillment continuity during the handoff to a 3PL, it's crucial for the 3PL to align its warehouse, customer service, and fulfillment teams around clear go-live expectations. The 3PL team should also pay close attention to execution details and keep open lines of communication to maintain a high level of customer service throughout the process. Communication also makes it easier to catch issues early and supports a smoother, more coordinated launch.



FAQs About Working with a 3PL

Q Will I lose control over my operations?

A *No. A 3PL acts as a trusted partner that handles your logistics needs, while you retain control over core business operations and strategic decisions. Businesses that work with 3PLs have a fair amount of direct oversight and visibility into who is handling their goods while gaining real-time visibility into inventory, order status, and performance metrics.*

Q Will I have to suspend operations while I transition to a 3PL?

A *No. Businesses do not have to suspend operations during the transition to a 3PL. Downtime can be minimized or avoided entirely as long as there is clear communication and an effective plan for transferring inventory and integrating systems as part of a phased handoff.*

Q Can a 3PL handle returns?

A *Yes. Third-party logistics providers typically handle product returns for their clients. This service saves businesses time and headaches.*

Q How do I maintain my brand voice?

A *Working with a 3PL can actually solidify your brand voice as the team enforces your brand standards with custom packaging, tissue paper, and branded inserts that create a consistent and memorable unboxing experience.*

Q Can I still ship Prime or offer fast shipping?

A *Yes. Choose a 3PL that offers same-day order fulfillment to ensure orders will arrive promptly. To ship Amazon Prime, look for a 3PL that supports Seller Fulfilled Prime (SFP) and meets Amazon's performance standards.*

Q How does a 3PL handle scaling for peak seasons and long-term growth?

A *A 3PL uses scalable systems and processes to support long-term growth and seasonal fluctuations. Specifically, they leverage flexible warehouse space, labor, and technology to manage increased order volumes during peak seasons and over time.*



Matt Bradbury
Director of Sales

Ready to Scale? Let's Talk.

Thank you for taking the time to read our e-book about how to find the right 3PL to scale your business. I hope this guide helped answer any questions you had about how a 3PL can support your business growth and what to look out for (and avoid) in a 3PL partner.

Time to Reach Out

If you believe your business is ready to outsource fulfillment and you're considering making the move to a 3PL, the next step is simple: reach out. When you contact G10, we'll start by learning about your business, including your order volume, fulfillment challenges, growth goals, and any specialized needs. From there, my team and I will provide a personalized fulfillment assessment to help determine if now is the right time to outsource, and how G10 can support your long-term success. **We're excited to talk with you about what's next for your business.**



Get in Touch!

Let's connect to discuss your needs and how G10 can assist with your 3PL needs!

With customizable integration, an experienced in-house team of developers and support staff, and a strong commitment to customer service, we're up for any challenge!



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