

The big and heavy 3PL checklist

The questions worth asking any 3PL you're considering for **big and heavy fulfillment**.

Grouped by the challenges big and heavy brands raise most. Print it, and run through it with every 3PL you talk to.

1 Cost

Shipping, surcharges, storage, and the full delivered invoice, not just the per-pick rate.

- ☐ What's your full landed cost per delivered unit on your biggest, heaviest product, with oversize, handling, residential, and fuel already in it?
- ☐ Which surcharges are discounted, and does the discount apply to the surcharges or only the base rate?
- ☐ Is the quote a fully loaded cost per delivered unit with every accessoril named, or a blended rate that hides the surcharges on big and heavy product?
- ☐ Do the surcharge triggers (additional handling, oversize, floor-load, retailer-compliance) all show up in the model?
- ☐ In addition to a complete rate card, will you price a set of our real historical orders as a sample invoice, so every provider is bidding the same shipments?
- ☐ Does the rate card include every line, or are there fees that only show up later in the agreement?

2 Storage

What it costs to hold big and heavy product, plus minimums and slow-moving stock.

- ☐ How long does your slowest big and heavy product sit before it sells, and what does it cost to hold through a full off-season?
- ☐ Does the storage rate step up as inventory ages, and on what day does the higher tier start?
- ☐ Is your inbound sized to real demand, or to a minimum order you're hoping to turn?
- ☐ How does heavy product stack and slot in the building, and what does that do to cost per unit versus a rate built on lighter goods?
- ☐ Is there any product you can't rack or floor-store, and does anything spill into third-party overflow space at extra cost?
- ☐ If we need temperature control or humidity limits, can the building hold them?
- ☐ Is there room to scale, or do you hit capacity in peak, when many brands bring in more product at once?
- ☐ If two providers price storage differently (per location, per square foot, per cubic foot), will you price the same inventory scenario so we can compare apples to apples?

3 Receiving

Getting heavy inbound containers and pallets checked in cleanly and on time.

- ☐ Is your inbound priced for both palletized and floor-loaded receiving, and do you know which your containers will arrive as?
- ☐ Does any product need an extra receiving step (battery pull, individual labeling, re-tape) that should be priced before it lands?
- ☐ Does heavy and bulky get its own receiving flow, separate from small parcel?
- ☐ What are your written SLAs, by inbound type, to unload, and separately to make product sellable (received, put away, available to ship), not just off the truck?
- ☐ Are there blackout dates when you can't take inbound, and how long does it take to get a receiving appointment?

4 Scalability

Whether a 3PL can absorb your peaks and growth without the operation buckling.

- ☐ When orders double or triple in your season, what happens to pick accuracy and on-time shipping, and can they show it?
- ☐ How does the operation flex back down in your off-season, so you're not paying for peak capacity year-round?
- ☐ What's their track record on the busiest weeks of the year, and what happened the last time one went wrong?
- ☐ How stable is the provider (ownership, financials, commitment to the 3PL business), so you're not absorbing a sudden exit?
- ☐ If we add a new sales channel or double volume next year, have you handled that jump before, and does outbound have the room?
- ☐ What does client success look like day to day: a designated point person, or a shared queue?

5 Amazon

FBA versus self-fulfillment, Seller Fulfilled Prime, and holding the badge on big products.

- ☐ What does each big and heavy product cost delivered under FBA (fee plus storage) versus a 3PL (prep, storage, shipping), side by side?
- ☐ Can the 3PL run Seller Fulfilled Prime on your big and heavy products, and what cutoff and SLA keep the badge?
- ☐ What did Amazon's oversize and Q4 storage fees cost you on your heaviest products last year?
- ☐ What two-day coverage can you hit from each node, and what would overnight air cost to cover the gap?
- ☐ Can you show a track record running each Amazon program you'd handle for us, and how familiar is your team with Amazon's compliance and KPIs, or will we be training you?

6 Inbound logistics

Getting big and heavy product imported into the US: freight, customs and brokerage, drayage, tariffs, and the landed cost per unit.

- ☐ Is your inbound strategy settled: port of entry, container cadence, and a customs broker you trust?
- ☐ What's the landed cost per unit, with duties, brokerage, drayage, and unloading in the same model as fulfillment?
- ☐ For overseas inbound, what's the container-unloading capability and the lag from arrival to put-away?
- ☐ Which ports of entry do you recommend, what does drayage from that port to the warehouse run, and how congested is that port right now?

7 Find a big-and-heavy-capable 3PL

The search for a provider actually built to handle big and heavy product.

- ☐ Does the building actually have the racking, dock doors, equipment, and trained labor for big and heavy product, or just the software?
- ☐ Can you run a pilot or a phased migration with checkpoints before a full cutover?
- ☐ When they miss, a mispick, a short shipment, or a late order, do they fix it automatically, or do you file a claim and wait?
- ☐ Can they show case studies from brands in your weight class, not just "we serve furniture"?

8 Platform integration

Connecting your store, marketplaces, and the 3PL's systems so orders flow cleanly.

- ☐ Can you run a sandbox test with your real catalog before signing (parent-child products, bundles, multi-package orders), not demo data?
- ☐ Which of your platforms integrate natively, versus through middleware or a public API?
- ☐ Who owns the integration day to day: your team, theirs, or a paid third party?
- ☐ What happens to an order that fails to sync at 4:45 on a Friday, and what is the exception path?
- ☐ Is there a per-user cost for the WMS, and a separate cost for reporting, or are those included?
- ☐ For an integration you don't already have built, what's the lead time and the build cost?
- ☐ How does adding each sales channel we plan to launch change the integration, support, and transaction fees?

9 Shipping speed

Order cutoffs and how fast big and heavy orders actually reach the customer.

- ☐ What's the order cutoff, and what makes it possible: do they slot inventory ahead of demand, or scramble?
- ☐ Where does speed actually matter to your customers, versus shaving a transit day nobody asked for?
- ☐ If speed is competitive in your category, is a second DC modeled before peak, not during it?
- ☐ How does their SLA hold during peak, not just on a March average?
- ☐ Do you dispatch same-day or next-day where we need it, and do you run weekends?
- ☐ Where a lane doesn't need speed, will you quote economy methods to save us money, and where it does, are the methods fast enough to hold the promise?

10 Geography

Where your customers are versus where the 3PL ships from, and the zones in between.

- ☐ What does a zone report from your last 90 days of orders say about where your customers actually are?
- ☐ Does one well-placed DC cover you, or does volume really justify splitting inventory across two?
- ☐ Could a DC near your port of entry or manufacturer claw back on inbound what it costs on outbound zones?
- ☐ What are the zone-by-zone shipping costs in the quote, not just "national footprint"?
- ☐ If we sell into retail or B2B, does your network put us close to the retailer distribution centers we ship into?
- ☐ Will you run a zone and transit-distribution study on our orders, and model how our sourcing locations (ports, manufacturers) affect inbound cost and transit time?

11 Tech and visibility

The portal, data, and reporting that show what is happening with inventory and orders.

- ☐ Is the underlying operation solid, or is it a great dashboard reporting failures beautifully?
- ☐ What's the data path in writing: API access, report cadence, and who builds custom reports at what cost?
- ☐ Can you stress-test your messiest scenario (a multi-package LTL order with a damage claim) during evaluation?
- ☐ Can you see a portal demo with heavy-brand data, not generic small-parcel demo data?
- ☐ Which reports are we running by hand today that you can automate, and can you show what you've automated for other brands, with the cost and lead time, not just describe it?

12 Kitting

Assembling bundles and multi-piece sets before they ship.

- ☐ Have you priced kits both ways: pre-built (inventory cost) versus assemble-on-demand (labor cost), for your velocity?
- ☐ How are kit revisions version-controlled, so a mid-stream product change doesn't break the build?
- ☐ Can you run a paid pilot of a few hundred kits before peak?
- ☐ How is kit-build labor priced: per kit, or per component handled?
- ☐ Can you take on ad-hoc project work in a pinch (QA, QC, FBA labeling), and is it priced at a fixed rate rather than open-ended hourly?

13 Accuracy

Picking and shipping the right product, especially among lookalike heavy items.

- ☐ Is there a real accuracy standard in writing, and how do they measure it: by order, line, or unit?
- ☐ How are lookalike and heavy products physically separated to prevent mispicks?
- ☐ Are you reconciling inventory monthly from day one, not waiting for an annual count?
- ☐ Can they show accuracy data segmented by product velocity, not just the easy fast-movers?
- ☐ When the wrong item ships, how often do you recover it, and what happens operationally and financially when you can't?

14 Retail, wholesale & B2B

Selling into retailers, wholesale, and B2B accounts, plus the EDI, routing, and chargeback rules that come with them.

- ☐ Do you take any responsibility for retailer chargebacks, or do those land entirely on us?
- ☐ Are your retailer integrations (EDI, ASNs, routing) in place and proven, so the data transfer is dependable and accurate?
- ☐ Do you have a track record shipping into the specific retailers we sell to?

15 Returns

Taking product back, inspecting and restocking it, and the return shipping that runs both ways on a heavy unit.

- ☐ Can you share a returns SOP from a client you support today, with the name redacted?
- ☐ How long does it take to process a return, inspect it, and put it away?
- ☐ Is returns processing priced hourly or at a fixed rate?
- ☐ Which returns platforms do you integrate with (for example Redo or Loop)?