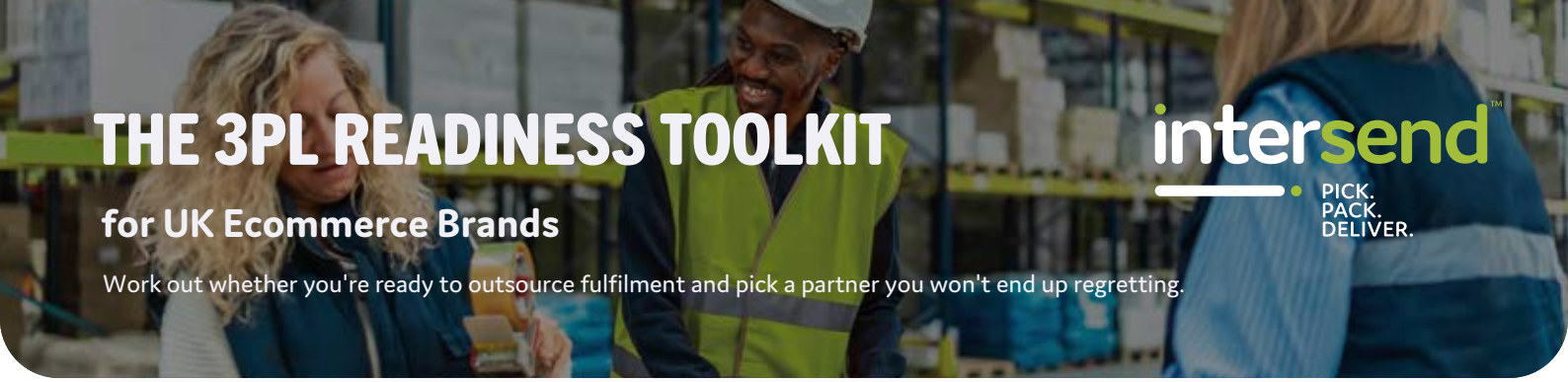


THE 3PL READINESS TOOLKIT

for UK Ecommerce Brands

Work out whether you're ready to outsource fulfilment and pick a partner you won't end up regretting.

intersend PICK. PACK. DELIVER.

Before you dive in

Somewhere between packing orders on your kitchen table and shipping a few thousand a month, most ecommerce brands hit the same wall. Fulfilment stops being a task you tick off and turns into the thing quietly eating your entire week.

You already know that feeling, or you wouldn't have downloaded this.

Here's the honest bit. Handing your fulfilment to a third party is a big call, and it's genuinely hard to undo once you're a few months in. Get it right and it's the best decision you make all year. Get it wrong and you've got late orders, angry customers and a contract you can't easily walk away from. So, it's worth slowing down and doing this properly.

That's what this toolkit is for. Four practical tools:

1. **The readiness self-assessment.** Are you actually ready, or does in-house still make sense for now?
2. **The 10 questions.** What to ask any 3PL before you sign anything.
3. **The comparison scorecard.** A simple way to score providers side by side instead of going on gut feel.
4. **The onboarding and migration checklist.** What actually happens when you switch, and how to do it without dropping the ball.

You don't have to work through these in order. If you're not even sure outsourcing is the right move yet, start with the self-assessment. If you've already got quotes on the table, jump to the scorecard.

Right. Let's get into it.

TOOL 1: THE OUTSOURCING READINESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

There's no magic number that says "now's the time". But there are signs. Tick every statement below that rings true for you.

- [ ] Fulfilment is regularly stealing hours you should be spending on marketing, product or growth
- [ ] You dread peak season because you're not sure you can physically get the orders out
- [ ] Orders are going out late, or the odd mistake is starting to creep in
- [ ] You've run out of storage space, or you're paying for space that sits half empty most of the year
- [ ] Shipping is costing more than you'd like and you've got no real way to negotiate it down
- [ ] You want to offer faster delivery but can't justify the cost of setting it up yourself
- [ ] You're moving into new channels or overseas markets and the logistics are getting messy
- [ ] Returns are a headache nobody in the business wants to own
- [ ] Your spend on warehouse staff, packaging and systems keeps climbing
- [ ] The idea of doubling your order volume fills you with dread rather than excitement

Now count your ticks.

☆	**0 to 2.** You're probably fine in-house for now. Keep this document somewhere safe, because things change fast when a brand is growing, and the honest truth is most people leave this decision later than they should.
☆☆	**3 to 5.** You're near the tipping point. Nothing's on fire yet, but the cracks are showing. This is actually the best time to have a conversation with a 3PL, before a crisis forces your hand and you end up signing with whoever can start on
☆☆☆	**6 or more.** You're past ready. Fulfilment is holding the business back, and every month you spend firefighting is a month you're not growing. Time to move.

One useful benchmark

As a rough guide, outsourcing tends to start making financial sense somewhere around 100 to 200 orders a month. That's not a hard rule though. It depends a lot on what you sell, how heavy or bulky it is, and how your current setup actually stacks up once you count your own time in the maths.

TOOL 2: THE 10 QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY 3PL BEFORE YOU SIGN

Every 3PL will tell you they're reliable, flexible and great to work with. Of course they will. The point of these questions is to get past the pitch and find out what they're actually like to work with day to day.

Ask all ten. Write down the answers. The gaps between what providers say here will tell you more than any brochure.

1. **Which platforms do you integrate with and how does it actually work?**
   Shopify, WooCommerce, Amazon, wherever you sell. You want a real-time integration, not someone re-keying orders by hand. Ask who sets it up and who fixes it when it breaks.
2. **What's your dispatch accuracy and how do you measure it?**
   A confident 3PL will give you a number. If they get vague here, that tells you something. Ask about same-day cut-off times too, because “next day” means nothing if the cut-off is 9am.
3. **How is your pricing structured and where do the extra charges live?**
   This is where the surprises hide. Get it broken down: storage, receiving goods in, pick, pack, packaging, returns, any minimum monthly spend. A per-order headline rate on its own tells you very little.
4. **What happens during peak?**
   Black Friday, Christmas, a launch that goes better than expected. Do they cap your volume? Bring in temp staff? Prioritise their biggest clients over you? You need to know before you're relying on them in November.
5. **Who's my actual point of contact?**
   A named account manager who knows your brand, or a ticketing system and a different person every time? When something goes wrong at 4pm on a Friday, this is the answer that matters.
6. **How do you handle returns?**
   Returns are a fact of ecommerce life, so this shouldn't be an afterthought. Ask how they inspect, restock and update your customer. Poor returns handling quietly wrecks customer trust.
7. **What visibility and reporting will I get?**
   You should be able to see your stock levels, order status and dispatch performance without having to email and wait. Ask to see the actual dashboard, not a screenshot from the sales deck.
8. **How long does onboarding take, and what do you need from me?**
   A straight answer here shows they've done this properly before. Vague timelines usually mean a bumpy start.
9. **What does the contract look like?**
   Length, notice period, how much flexibility you've got if things change, and how you'd exit if it doesn't work out. Read this bit twice.
10. **Can I speak to a couple of your current clients in a similar sector?**
    The best question of the lot. A 3PL that's proud of its service will happily put you in touch. Hesitation here is worth paying attention to.

TOOL 3: THE 3PL PROVIDER COMPARISON SCORECARD

Once you've asked your questions, you'll have a lot of answers swimming around. This turns them into something you can compare at a glance.

Score each provider from **1 to 5** on every line. 1 means poor, 5 means excellent. Add up the columns at the bottom.

What you're judging	Provider A	Provider B	Provider C
Platform integration (real-time, easy setup)			
Dispatch accuracy and delivery speed			
Pricing transparency (no hidden extras)			
Returns handling			
Ability to cope with peaks and spikes			
Contract flexibility and fair exit terms			
Communication and account management			
Experience in your sector			
Reporting and stock visibility			
Gut feel: would you trust them with your customers?			
Total (out of 50)			

How to read your scores:

The totals give you a quick ranking, but don't just crown the highest number and stop thinking. Not every line matters equally for your brand. If you sell supplements, sector experience and compliance might be everything. If you're heading into a big Q4, how they cope with peaks probably outweighs a small price difference.

So before you tally up, circle the three lines that matter most to ***you***. If a provider scores low on any of those three, a strong total elsewhere doesn't really save them.

And that last row, the gut feel one, isn't filler. If you came away from a call feeling like you were being managed rather than listened to, that rarely improves once the contract's signed.

TOOL 4: THE ONBOARDING AND MIGRATION CHECKLIST

You've chosen someone. Good. Now comes the part that trips brands up, because moving your fulfilment is a bit like moving house. It's fine if you plan it, and stressful if you wing it.

A realistic onboarding timeline

Every 3PL runs onboarding slightly differently, but a sensible move usually looks something like this:

When	What's happening
Week 1	Kick-off call, account manager assigned, integration started
Week 1 to 2	Store connected and tested, SKU data shared and checked
Week 2 to 3	Stock arrives, gets counted, logged and put away
Week 3	Test orders run through the full process to catch problems early
Week 3 to 4	Go live, first real orders watched closely on both sides
End of month 1	Review together: what's working, what needs tweaking

If a provider promises to have you fully live in two days, be a little wary. Fast onboarding sounds great right up until something's been rushed and your first week of live orders pays for it.

The migration checklist

Whether you're coming from another 3PL or bringing your in-house work to an end, work through this before anything moves:

- [ ] Check the notice period with your current provider and give notice in writing
- [ ] Reconcile your stock so you know exactly what you've got before it travels
- [ ] Export and clean up your SKU data (product names, barcodes, weights, dimensions)
- [ ] Get your store integrated and tested with the new provider
- [ ] Agree a switch-over date that steers well clear of your busy season
- [ ] Update your returns address and redirect anything already in transit
- [ ] Sort out packaging, inserts and any branded materials for the new site
- [ ] Brief your customer service team so they know what's changing and when
- [ ] Run test orders end to end before you flip the switch
- [ ] Keep a small stock buffer during the move so a hiccup doesn't leave you out of stock

Tick these off and a switch that feels daunting on paper becomes fairly ordinary in practice.

When you're ready to talk

If you've worked through this toolkit and you're thinking it's probably time, we're here to help.

InterSend is a UK-based 3PL that works with growing eCommerce brands across sectors like health and supplements, pet, toys and gifts and plenty more. The idea is to feel like an extension of your own team, with a named account manager, real-time visibility over your stock and orders and pricing you can actually make sense of.

GET IN TOUCH FOR A TAILORED QUOTE

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intersend™

PICK.
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