

fulfilment.com reveals why ecommerce brands actually switch 3PL providers

Following 75 conversations with ecommerce brands, fulfilment.com sets out the main reasons they switch fulfilment partners, and how those reasons cluster.



LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, September 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Ecommerce brands rarely begin looking for a new [fulfilment](#) partner without cause. Some are leaving an existing [3PL](#), and others are outgrowing an in-house operation, but most are doing so under pressure, after months of absorbing a problem that has finally started to cost them revenue.

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James Olsen, Founder and CEO, fulfilment.com

The underlying issues will be familiar to anyone who has run a warehouse, but what is less visible is how often each one surfaces, and which problems tend to arrive together.

Drawing on 75 conversations with brands actively [searching for a new fulfilment partner](#), the findings set out why brands begin the search and the pressures behind those decisions, not the state of the wider market.

What the conversations show

- Pricing is usually the first thing brands raise.
- Service and operational issues tend to compound rather than appear alone.
- Capability gaps become decisive when a 3PL can't support key requirements.
- Some brands search before they've even launched, often due to minimums.
- Triggers aren't always operational: commercial fit and responsiveness matter too.

Immediate reasons for switching

- Pricing and unexpected costs: Surprise fees, margins added through intermediated models, rising carrier costs or a pricing structure that no longer fits the brand's unit economics can

quickly make an existing arrangement unsustainable. Brands selling subscription boxes and heavy products raise these concerns more often than others.

- Service failures and product losses: Lost or mis-shipped inventory, damaged products and returns processes that destroy stock rather than salvage it can quickly erode confidence in a provider. For brands selling high-value SKUs, a single significant loss or fulfilment failure can be enough to trigger a move.

Day-to-day friction

- Software, billing and visibility problems: Weak WMS and portal integrations, opaque invoices, no reliable API or Shopify connection. Several brands described auditing bills by hand every week, and losing any reliable view of their own KPIs in the process.
- Communications and account management: Slow responses, no dedicated contact, and no escalation path. This matters most on tightly coordinated launches, where a delayed reply results in fulfilment errors.
- Capacity, scaling and seasonality: Growth or peak season exposing throughput limits. More than one brand described switching off marketing spend because the warehouse couldn't keep up with demand.
- Reporting and carrier performance visibility: Carrier performance data and transparent SLAs are increasingly expected as standard. Brands move when they can't get either.

Where capability runs out

- Returns, rework and complex workflows: Inspection, refurbishment, serialisation, kitting, hygienic liner replacement, and FBA prep. When the process can't be replicated, brands often switch providers.
- FBA and marketplace readiness: For brands selling through marketplaces, fulfilment requirements can be highly specific. Opaque or uncompetitive prep pricing, or FBA treated as an afterthought rather than a core workflow, can become a reason to look elsewhere.
- Product and regulatory specialism: Requirements such as hazardous goods handling, chilled storage, GDP or FDA compliance and serialisation can rule out otherwise suitable providers. For brands with specialist requirements, these capabilities are often non-negotiable.

Commercial fit goes beyond the warehouse

- Minimums and commercial flexibility: Startups and small launches turned down for not meeting volume thresholds. A one to two pallet launch is a common profile among brands

rejected by other fulfilment providers.

- Geographic coverage, tariffs and localisation: International brands moving stock in-country to cut duties and transit times, particularly on UK to US, and EU to UK routes.
- Direct control and a simpler commercial model: A preference for dealing with the warehouse directly, without layers that add cost and distance from the operation.

Reasons compound until breaking point

Brands rarely leave over a single issue. In most cases, several of the pressures above compound until the situation becomes urgent, whether that is lost sales, a failed peak, a significant error, or an unsustainable cost.

"You know when your 3PL starts growing and getting more customers, and they start making a lot of mistakes and you just don't see the end of it?" — eCommerce toy brand, UK

What this suggests about 3PL partnerships

Across the conversations, many of the problems appear to begin before the 3PL relationship does. The issue is often not simply that a provider performs poorly over time, but that the original match was wrong from the start. A brand leaving over pricing structure needs a different conversation to one leaving over a returns workflow that destroyed stock. A brand rejected elsewhere for a two pallet launch needs a third. As generic enquiries, all three look alike. Only the reason behind the search tells them apart.

"Brands don't switch fulfilment partners lightly. By the time they start looking, something has usually been going wrong for a while," said James Olsen, CEO, fulfilment.com "What stands out is how often the deciding factor sits outside the warehouse itself. Pricing structure, billing clarity and responsiveness come up as frequently as operational performance, which suggests the way a relationship is set up matters as much as how it is run."

The same reasons also recur. Pricing pressure, capacity constraints and capability gaps are not events but conditions. They build over the life of any fulfilment relationship, and whether they end the next one appears to depend on how much operational fit existed at the start. Scrutiny, however, is concentrated in a particular place. Pricing transparency, billing accuracy and responsiveness account for a substantial share of everything cited, and none of the three is a direct warehouse operation. The rarer reasons work differently. A provider that can't legally handle hazardous goods, or hold stock at a specific temperature, isn't a partial fit for those brands, and no amount of service quality elsewhere closes that gap.

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