



The Fulfillment Partner Checklist

The Following Checklist Will Help You Determine Which Fulfillment Provider is Right for You.

The choice of fulfillment partner is critical. How the services are performed is a direct reflection of your brand. It's important to take the time to do your homework and select a partner that best represents you and your product.

In order to help you make an informed decision, we've developed the following checklist to help you compare potential fulfillment providers:

Shipping

Large retailers have changed the game in terms of shipping direct-to-consumer. Most businesses are finding it hard to compete with the free and low-cost shipping that big box retailers offer. The right fulfillment partner can help you compete by giving you access to discounted shipping methods and incorporating technology that will help control shipping costs. Below are important questions to ask.

Shipping Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Do you incorporate shipping intelligence software to rate shop by cost and/or time-in-transit goals?	Yes		a2b can select the right carrier and service method to achieve the optimal balance between time and cost.
Are there discounted carrier options that don't rely heavily on a consolidator model?	Yes		Shipping with a carrier that consolidates packages often results in longer delivery times. Be sure to understand how each proposed carrier works.
Do you have relationships with multiple carriers?	Yes		a2b ships with all major carriers.
Do you offer discounted freight rates?	Yes		a2b offers deeply discounted rates.
Can you provide branded communication regarding shipping updates and tracking?	Yes		a2b is invisible to the end-customer. We brand labels, packing slips and email notifications with your brand.



Depth-of-Service

Many fulfillment providers offer a suite of services, including fulfillment, order management, customer service, backend shopping cart and reverse logistics. Keep in mind that choosing a provider that can offer more of these service categories is an opportunity to simplify your operation and save you time.

Which Services Will You Need for Your Business:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Business to Consumer (B2C)?	Yes		
Business to Business (B2B)?	Yes		
Retail?	Yes		
Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)?	Yes		
Payment Card Industry Compliance (PCI)?	Yes		
Customer Service (Contact Center)?	Yes		
Order Management?	Yes		
Value Added Services:			
Kitting?	Yes		
Assembly?	Yes		
Refurbishment?	Yes		
Returns?	Yes		



Facilities

When seeking out locations to store your product, you must consider what best suits your company's needs. Often people focus on price, available space and location. However, it's equally important that you choose a fulfillment provider that can ensure that the goods entrusted to them are both safe and secure.

Facilities Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Are the facilities secured:			
Security / Alarm System?	Yes		
Surveillance / Camera System?	Yes		
Access Controlled?	Yes		
Fenced and Gated?	Yes		
Fire Suppression?	Yes		
Option for Climate Controlled Space?	Yes		
How much space is in your network?	560,000 SQ.FT.		



How Experienced Are They?

Fulfillment is much more complicated than most people think. To do it accurately and cost effectively you need specialized systems, labor, management and expertise. An experienced fulfillment provider excels in all of these areas. Consider these checklist items related to the fulfillment experience.

Experience Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
How long have you been in business?	17yrs		
Do you have references to provide?	Yes		
Are you members of any alliances/associations?	Yes		<i>a2b is an active member in many associations that are both geared to Warehousing and Logistics as well as specific industry verticals.</i>
International Warehouse Logistics Association	Yes		
Warehousing Education and Research Council?	Yes		
Southeastern Warehouse Association?	Yes		
Direct Response Marketing Alliance?	Yes		
Electronic Retailing Association?	Yes		
Direct Selling Association?	Yes		
Are there documented procedures in place for all activities?	Yes		<i>a2b uses detailed SOP's in all departments.</i>
Do you have an appropriate level of staff?	Yes		<i>a2b is an expert at managing labor. Most staff is full-time, resulting in a high level of quality and consistency.</i>
Can you adapt to peak and non-peak seasons with a plan for temps and/or seasonal employees?	Yes		<i>a2b is uniquely able to flex labor.</i>



Does the Technology Fit My Needs?

Technology is a major driver within the logistics industry. These days, it is critical for fulfillment providers to leverage technology to increase efficiency and provide an exceptional customer experience. Look for providers with a technology plan that can adapt to the ever-changing needs of the industry and your business.

Technology Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Is there an online portal for handling the following:			
Order Entry?	Yes		
Inventory?	Yes		
Order Status and History?	Yes		
Receipt Log?	Yes		
Returns?	Yes		
Lot and Expiry Tracking?	Yes		
Minimum Inventory Alerts	Yes		
Order Management:			
Subscription/Continuity Management?	Yes		
Payment Processing?	Yes		
Customer Care?	Yes		
Integrations:			
Flat File?	Yes		
API?	Yes		
Batch?	Yes		
EDI - Electronic Data Interchange?	Yes		
Do you have advanced reporting capabilities (Business Intelligence Tools)?	Yes		<i>a2b leverages the industry's most advance Business Intelligence tools allowing our clients to mine their data and create interactive dashboards to better understand their business and make informed decisions.</i>
Do you have experience with support vendors I am currently working with?	Most Likely		<i>a2b is integrated with most major shopping carts/ platforms, marketplaces, and payment processors.</i>



Location, Location, Location.

The decision on where to locate a fulfillment operation is more important than ever. Fast delivery and free shipping have become the norm. But how do you position your shipping facility in a location that allows you to optimize shipping costs, while still delivering the highest level of customer satisfaction?

Location Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Are your locations in close proximity to my customers (Majority of the US Population is east of the Mississippi River)?	Yes		
Is the operation close to major distribution hubs?	Yes		
Air?	Yes		
Sea Ports?	Yes		
Railways?	Yes		
Highways?	Yes		
Interstates?	Yes		
Are you located in a high cost area?	No		
Is the location subject to unionized labor?	No		



Customer Care / Contact Center Services

Customer Care for the end-customer is an important component of providing an exceptional customer experience. This includes communication with the end-customer regarding product information, order status/changes, returns processing and even sales. Some fulfillment providers offer Customer Care / Contact Center services under the same roof from where the packages ship. Skilled providers know how to make Customer Care a profit center vs. a cost center, by incorporating upselling and sale-saving techniques, offering you great value.

Location Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Do you have Customer Care / Contact Center capabilities?	Yes		
Is the service provided by you or a partner?	By Us		
Live Agent Inbound Calls?	Yes		
Live Agent Outbound Calls?	Yes		
Email Support?	Yes		
Chat Support?	Yes		
Social Media Monitoring / Support?	Yes		
Expert save-the-sale abilities?	Yes		
Bilingual (English/Spanish) agents?	Yes		



Consider the Costs

If you are handling fulfillment yourself, there are several factors you budget for – warehouse space lease, utilities, labor, etc. Predicting the variability in these categories can prove difficult. Outsourcing can limit fixed costs while leveraging the fulfillment provider's efficiencies and scalability. Look for a provider that offers fair, yet competitive rates for the quality of service that you expect. Beware of prices that are too high or too low. Remember that you are seeking a professional and experienced partner to support a critical function of your business.

Pricing Checklist:	a2b	Other Provider	NOTES
Are the Pricing and Terms clearly described?	Yes		<i>Beware of hidden fees.</i>
Is the pricing competitive?	Yes		
Are there costs for setup and integration?	Yes		<i>Setup and integration work is extremely important to a successful project. A successful implementation saves costs associated with errors. a2b aims to cover its costs with this process. Because we are pre-integrated with most external vendors, these costs are typically low and always fair.</i>
Are there weekly or monthly minimums?	Yes		<i>a2b has small minimums in place to cover basic costs. Most of our clients' activities surpass these minimums.</i>

