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*One key step to finding answers to any logistics, supply chain, or technology challenge is knowing the right questions to ask.*

*Inbound Logistics assembled a team of supply chain and logistics technology leaders, and asked for their perspectives on the important logistics challenges and opportunities impacting your business.*

*More importantly, these logistics thought leaders can give you guidance when considering improvements to your business processes.*

# Thought Leaders

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## THOUGHT LEADERS

# Choosing the Right 3PL and Supporting Supply Chain Excellence



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Choosing the right third-party logistics (3PL) provider can make or break your goal of achieving supply chain excellence and have a significant impact on your company's brand.

**Q:** *What are some top factors to consider when evaluating a 3PL's potential to deliver supply chain excellence while upholding your brand?*

**A:** You want to ensure that a capable and safe third-party logistics provider is managing your loads — your hard work and dedication. Your decision to select a 3PL should go beyond the bottom line and qualify the value that your 3PL partner can offer. Ask yourself:

- Will this 3PL do what's right, even when no one is looking?
- Will my goods arrive safely and be handled with precision and respect?

**Q:** *How is supply chain excellence related to "doing the right thing?"*

**A:** Brands that promote commitment to sustainability and corporate responsibility want a 3PL whose values align. Ruan believes environmental stewardship and community service are more than good business decisions; they are moral imperatives.

Ruan is a SmartWay Excellence Award recipient for industry leadership in supply chain environmental performance and energy efficiency. We design supply chain solutions that emphasize fuel efficiency, energy conservation, and using renewable energy, all of which improve the bottom line. These are savings we can—and do—pass on to our customers.

Customers are beginning to expect their preferred brands to combine efforts for social responsibility. Ruan has a long history of fighting food insecurity alongside our customers and suppliers. We have contributed to and coordinated many food collection efforts benefitting local, national, and international concerns.

Also, we endorse the World Food Prize, which recognizes significant contributions from any field that affects the world's food supply, including food and agriculture, science and technology, manufacturing, marketing, nutrition, economics, poverty alleviation, political leadership, or the social sciences. Many of our partners have contributed to the World Food Prize by speaking, attending, or sponsoring forum events.

**Q:** *Why is safety a pillar for supply chain excellence?*

**A:** All operational decisions are made with safety in mind—the safety of our drivers, technicians, warehouse workers, our customers' employees, and the motoring public, as well as our equipment and our customers' products.

Ruan was awarded the American Trucking Associations' President's Trophy in the over 100 million miles category. The President's Trophy is the highest safety award available to motor carriers that demonstrate innovative approaches to safety and go above and beyond to keep the highways safe.

Everything we do is done with integrity, and everything we do has no value if it is not done safely. Those promises are at the core of Ruan's brand and embedded in the solutions for our partners that deliver supply chain excellence.

# How to Choose a 3PL and Reap the Benefits

**Q:** *What are the benefits of using a 3PL company for your shipping needs?*

**A:** You can streamline your processes by freeing up your employees' time to work on other priorities and objectives. You will save money and achieve greater flexibility by leveraging better economies of scale, established carrier relationships, and knowledge of the industry provided by 3PLs.

You can also take advantage of better customer service by establishing a relationship with your 3PL for all of your shipping needs. And if the 3PL operates through a nationwide Agent Station model, like we do at DLS Worldwide, you will find a partner who is familiar with key vendors as well as "who" can make things happen when needed in local markets.

**Q:** *What should you look for when choosing a 3PL?*

**A:** One thing you should consider is the breadth of offerings they provide. Can they handle any mode, any size, or type of shipment? Another consideration is technology. Do they offer robust technology that easily integrates with your existing systems? Is their

system easy to use? Does it offer cradle-to-grave capabilities and full visibility of your order throughout the process?

You should also seek a provider that is established and maintains a strong network of locations. Does the 3PL have a proven history? Do they have vast experience as a shipper and a logistics provider? Do they have offices and/or stations in numerous areas to help meet your shipping needs? Most importantly, will they be more than a simple service provider?

When you find a 3PL who can be a true partner to you, takes the time to understand your needs, and is flexible enough to keep up with changes, including with your vendors, the choice should be easy.

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# How to Choose a TMS

**Q:** *What are some important things to consider when selecting a TMS solution?*

**A:** Deploying a Transportation Management System (TMS) can be complicated, time-consuming, and expensive. Fortunately, this does not need to be true, thanks to systems with a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) delivery model, which help you navigate the process of selecting and deploying a TMS solution in a fraction of the time and cost of traditional solutions.

Frequently, enterprise-wide TMS are identified as the most-needed add-on module to established ERP and WMS deployments. While enterprise TMS solutions are an option, realizing quick ROI greatly depends on the delivery model. A cloud-based solution beats the legacy deployment methods by an order of magnitude. Deployment time is measured in weeks rather than months or years. Cost is predictable, with a monthly subscription versus millions in capital expenses.

With the SaaS delivery model, the vendor manages the hardware, infrastructure, software, tools, and personnel. Upgrades are seamless, and there is no need to schedule deployment windows to support upgrades, fixes, and patches.

In addition, there is no concern about who on your team will work with the added servers, databases, tools, and network connections and whether or not they have the right skills for the task.

Because integration with existing systems is important, select a vendor with proven experience in quickly integrating with leading ERP or WMS systems. This requires an open system architecture that supports multiple data formats including XML, EDI, and web services.

The next significant integration criterion is the scope of carrier connectivity. The higher the number of carriers familiar with the solution you are evaluating, the easier it will be to establish data links between your TMS and your carriers.

Consider these features in the evaluation checklist:

- Open architecture to enable accelerated data mapping
- Support for multiple integration options including XML, EDI, and web services
- Proven record integration with commercially available ERP or WMS
- Growing integrated carrier network
- Ad hoc, real-time reporting
- Cloud computing capabilities
- Security, redundancy, reliability, scalability
- Support for all pertinent modes of transportation

**Q:** *How long should deployment take?*

**A:** Once you have decided on a cloud solution, narrow your list down further by looking for a vendor with repeatable processes that get their customers online quickly and smoothly.

A three-month deployment window should be your benchmark. A short and efficient implementation process means you can start realizing the return on your TMS investment sooner than later. Implementation best practices include:

- Pre-filled forms to guide requirements-gathering and configuration
- Experienced deployment team with domain expertise
- Regular stakeholder check-in meetings

Rapidly realize ROI (in some cases, 10–12 weeks) with a short deployment cycle and savings in hardware, tools, and personnel.

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**Fortigo works hard to get you up and running easily. Considering a TMS? Contact us first to discover how we can meet your needs quickly and save your organization money.**



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