CASE STUDY · CANDY RETAIL

IT'SUGAR Chose Its First 3PL From 10 Candidates and Grew DTC From Zero to 4,000 Orders a Month

A candy retailer with about 110 stores had never used a 3PL and was drop-shipping everything to its stores. 3PL Bridge helped it compare 10 operators, solve food-grade and temperature requirements, and launch an ecommerce channel that grew to 4,000 orders a month.

DTC from zero to 4,000 orders a month

AT A GLANCE

Company	IT'SUGAR, candy and novelty retail (about 110 stores)
Before	No 3PL; vendors drop-shipped directly to stores
Requirements	Food-grade, FDA-registered space; temperature control for chocolate; SQF Level 3 for wholesale
Channels	Store replenishment, wholesale and a new DTC channel
Region	Chicago area (Illinois, Indiana and Atlanta priced)
Timeline	March to September 2025, intake to signed contract

BY THE NUMBERS

10
3PLs compared

0 → 4,000
DTC orders a month

110
stores kept stocked

Background

IT'SUGAR is a candy and novelty retailer with about 110 stores across the United States, plus locations in Canada and Hawaii. Until 2025 it had never worked with a 3PL. Product was drop-shipped straight to stores, which meant heavy parcel spend and very little visibility into inventory or flow.

The challenge

The team needed a central warehouse that could restock stores, support wholesale customers and launch a direct-to-consumer channel, in that order, without ever having run a 3PL relationship before. The plan was phased: novelty items such as plush, mugs and apparel first, candy second.

Candy made the requirements strict. The facility had to be food-grade and FDA-registered, some wholesale customers required SQF Level 3 certification, and chocolate had to stay below 78°F, with extra temperature-controlled staging needed about three months a year. Ecommerce volume was expected at 4,000 to 6,000 orders a month, with spikes of 8,000 to 10,000 around Christmas and Valentine's Day.

What mattered most: IT'SUGAR's Decision-Making Criteria

Every 3PL Bridge evaluation starts by turning the team's pain points into weighted Decision-Making Criteria. Operators are then qualified and compared against those criteria, not against a generic checklist. These are the criteria that shaped IT'SUGAR's decision.

Criterion	What it meant for this brand	Importance
Food-grade compliance	FDA-registered, food-grade space and a path to SQF Level 3.	●●●●● 5/5
Temperature control for chocolate	Chocolate held below 78°F, with seasonal temperature-controlled staging.	●●●●● 5/5
Transparent pricing	Every line on a sample invoice tied to a real service.	●●●●● 5/5
Store replenishment and wholesale	Parcel and LTL to 110 stores plus wholesale pallet staging.	●●●●○ 4/5
DTC launch readiness	Shopify integration and capacity for holiday spikes.	●●●●○ 4/5
Onboarding support	Help building processes for a team new to 3PLs.	●●●●○ 4/5
Central location	Reach to stores nationwide at a competitive cost.	●●●○○ 3/5

Importance on a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 could decide the outcome on its own.

How the evaluation worked

We scoped all three channels, then gathered pricing from operators in Illinois, Indiana and Atlanta while IT'SUGAR weighed about 10 candidates in total. Rates were reworked into a tiered structure the brand could compare cleanly, including all-in pallet build pricing for store shipments and parcel rates by zone.

When the leading operator's pro-forma invoice showed a line of about $40,000 that the team could not tie to a specific service, it went back for explanation before anything was signed. The brand's legal team worked through SLAs and certifications, and the president, merchandising, business strategy and technology leaders toured the Chicago-area facility before final approval from the parent company. The contract was signed in September 2025, with Shopify connected through APIs for real-time orders, tracking and inventory sync.

The result

Stores stayed stocked from a central, food-grade operation, and the new DTC channel grew from zero to 4,000 orders a month.

What other brands can take from this

- If you have never used a 3PL, pick a partner that will help build your processes, not just store your product.
- Ask for a sample invoice on a real order and make every line explain itself before you sign.
- For food and confectionery, confirm certifications and temperature limits in writing. They are pass/fail, not nice-to-haves.

Questions brands ask

What does a candy brand need from a 3PL?

At a minimum a food-grade, FDA-registered facility, temperature control for chocolate and, for some wholesale customers, SQF certification. IT'SUGAR required all three and chocolate held below 78°F.

How many 3PLs should a brand compare?

Enough to see real price and capability differences. IT'SUGAR weighed about 10 operators, with pricing gathered in Illinois, Indiana and Atlanta, before choosing a Chicago-area partner.

Written by 3PL Bridge with IT'SUGAR's approval. Operator names are kept private. Published November 2026.