CASE STUDY · MERCHANDISE AND APPAREL

How SpaceX Tested Whether a 3PL Move Made Financial Sense

SpaceX's merchandise team wanted to know whether moving its 6,000-order-a-month apparel operation to a new 3PL would pay off. 3PL Bridge put every option on the same basis so the team could make the call on real numbers.

Made the move decision on real numbers

AT A GLANCE

Company	SpaceX merchandise (apparel and accessories)
Volume	About 6,000 DTC orders a month
Region	United States
Compared	Five apparel-capable 3PLs from our network, outside bids SpaceX already had, and its current 3PL's pricing
Analyst time	More than 20 hours of pricing normalization
Timeline	March to May 2026

BY THE NUMBERS

20+
hours normalizing pricing

5
operators benchmarked

1
market benchmark delivered

Background

SpaceX sells apparel and accessories direct to fans, at roughly 6,000 orders a month. In early 2026 the merchandise team brought 3PL Bridge in to answer one question: would moving to a new 3PL pay off for the business this year?

The challenge

The team already had bids from several 3PLs, each built on its own assumptions about storage, receiving, packaging and parcel. Headline rates could not be compared directly, so there was no reliable way to see what a move would actually save.

A move also carries its own cost: transition fees, inventory transfer, integration work and the time it takes a new operation to settle in. Any real comparison had to include those, along with what the team was trying to achieve internally.

What mattered most: SpaceX'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 SpaceX's decision.

Criterion	What it meant for this brand	Importance
Total cost against the current setup	Real savings after every fee, not headline rates.	●●●●● 5/5
Transition cost and risk	What a move would cost and how it could affect orders and customers.	●●●●● 5/5
Apparel accuracy and presentation	Correct size and style, packed the way fans expect.	●●●●○ 4/5
Peak handling	Capacity for demand spikes around high-attention moments.	●●●●○ 4/5
Fit with internal goals	Whether a move served what the team was trying to achieve this year.	●●●●○ 4/5
Integration effort	Work required to connect a new operator to the storefront.	●●●○○ 3/5

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

How the evaluation worked

We briefed five apparel-capable 3PLs in our network on SpaceX's operation and gathered their pricing alongside the bids the team already had and its current 3PL's rates. Then we spent more than 20 hours rebuilding every option on the same basis: same order profile, same storage footprint, same receiving assumptions and same parcel mix.

With every option on equal footing, the team could weigh the true savings of each against the cost of a transition and its own priorities for the year.

The result

The benchmark showed SpaceX's current pricing was already competitive with the market for its order profile. Given its internal goals for the year, the team chose to keep its current setup for now.

SpaceX left with a full market benchmark and a clear view of what a future move would need to deliver to make financial sense. Whether a brand moves or stays, the decision should rest on numbers that compare like with like.

What other brands can take from this

- Bids built on different assumptions cannot be compared until someone rebuilds them on the same order profile.
- Include transition cost and timing in the comparison, not just per-order rates.
- A market benchmark is valuable either way: it either justifies a move or confirms your current pricing is competitive.

Questions brands ask

How do I know if switching 3PLs will actually save money?

Rebuild every quote, including your current 3PL's pricing, on the same order profile, storage footprint and parcel mix, then add the cost of the transition. For SpaceX's roughly 6,000 monthly apparel orders, that took more than 20 hours of analysis.

Is a 3PL benchmark useful if I end up staying?

Yes. SpaceX used its benchmark to confirm its current pricing was competitive and to set a clear bar a future move would need to clear.

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

3PL Bridge helps brands evaluate, compare and choose 3PLs. No cost to brands.

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