

eBook

Choosing the Right ERP Platform for 3PL Companies



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Unique ERP Requirements of 3PL Companies

Third-party logistics providers (3PLs) have distinct needs compared to manufacturers, retailers, or shippers. A 3PL ERP platform must be capable of handling:

- **Warehouse operations (WMS)** – multi-client inventory, RF scanning, value-added services
- **Transportation (TMS / FMS)** – planning, rating, tendering, tracking, freight forwarding
- **Order management (OMS)** – multi-channel, multi-warehouse orchestration
- **3PL billing and contracts** – customer-specific rates, surcharges, storage, and services
- **Core ERP** – finance, multi-company, reporting, analytics, compliance

Many systems on the market perform some of these tasks (some better than others). Still, only a few combine strong financial ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) functionality with the additional capabilities needed for true end-to-end coverage for 3PLs, rather than just offering “good distribution features” or “great WMS.”

What’s the Best ERP for 3PLs?

Unfortunately, there is no “best” ERP for all 3PL companies. When selecting an ERP for your 3PL business, much depends on the type of business you are conducting. For example, are you primarily involved in international freight forwarding (including international shipping, customs, multimodal transport, and warehouse management), or are you more aligned with a warehouse-centric 3PL (including cold chain logistics, public warehousing, and fulfillment)?

Most dedicated ERP systems focus on supporting a company’s financial and reporting capabilities. Some include additional industry-specific capabilities embedded into the ERP product itself, such as distribution, manufacturing, and warehouse management. However, most ERP products require the purchase of separate add-on products to provide a complete 3PL-specific solution.

As a general rule, when purchasing an ERP for your 3PL business, you want a comprehensive system that can be easily customized and supports the functions you require, with a minimum of add-on products to minimize complexity and licensing costs.

Some companies opt to purchase best-of-breed WMS, TMS, and/or OMS products to manage their business operations. These dedicated software products typically offer superior functionality compared to those available in most ERPs. However, these products will still require an ERP to handle the finances and back-end processes. These types of companies are typically larger companies that leverage their parent company’s ERP system.

Comparing 3PL ERP Solutions

→ Dynamics 365 Business Central + Boltrics: A true ERP plus a 3PL solution in one platform

Dynamics 365 Business Central is Microsoft's cloud ERP for small and mid-market companies. Business Central includes finance, purchasing, sales, invoicing, and multi-company and multi-currency support. Business Central Premium also includes comprehensive features for distribution, manufacturing, and warehouse management.

Boltrics is a 3PL industry solution built on Business Central that adds WMS, TMS, FMS (forwarding), customs, and 3PL-specific billing for logistics service providers. Boltrics plugs directly into the Business Central backbone with:

- 3PL-grade WMS, including multi-client, RF, cross-dock, cold storage, and value-added logistics
- TMS, including route planning, carrier integration, tariffs, and telematics
- FMS, including freight forwarding workflows, quotes, consolidations, and documentation
- Customs declarations that can be triggered during air, sea, or road shipment processing, enabling logistics providers to manage freight and customs in a unified workflow rather than separate tasks.


Together, they form a **single platform where:**

- Warehouse activities, value-added services, and transport jobs flow directly into Business Central's invoicing and financials.
- 3PL operations run natively within a complete ERP, rather than alongside it.
- Unlike most ERP solutions and 3PL-only WMS suites, **Business Central + Boltrics** offers a true ERP + 3PL solution in a single platform.

Flexible and extensible. Business Central is highly configurable and customizable:

- Microsoft's extension model using AL extensions allows developers to modify Business Central's program logic without affecting the core system.
- Business Central includes a wide range of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that allow users to integrate their ERP with most modern business applications.
- Microsoft's **Power Platform** includes tools to automate business processes, develop low-code / no-code business apps, perform in-depth data analytics with Power BI, and create AI-driven agents and customizations with Copilot Studio.
- In addition, a large Independent Software Vendor (ISV) ecosystem provides additional WMS, TMS, EDI, and industry applications as add-ons.

Business Central combined with Boltrics allows 3PLs to build self-service portals, dashboards, and mobile apps, handle complex warehouse and freight-forwarding scenarios, and integrate with robotics, carriers, eCommerce, and customer systems.



Leverage the full Microsoft ecosystem and AI. Because it is built on the Microsoft technology stack, a 3PL using Business Central and Boltrics can tap into:

- Microsoft 365 – Outlook, Teams, Excel, SharePoint for document and collaboration flows
- Power Platform – Low-code automation, custom apps, and advanced reporting
- Azure and Fabric – data warehousing, analytics, data lake, and AI services
- Copilot and AI – emerging AI assistants for finance, operations, and custom agents

The combination of Business Central and Boltrics provides greater flexibility for customization than logistics-only systems, which are configurable but tightly control custom development of the application logic. For logistics companies that have already standardized on Microsoft security, identity, and productivity tools, this means **a single, consistent platform** rather than multiple, isolated systems to manage.

→ **CargoWise: An all-in-one 3PL solution**

CargoWise is a logistics execution platform on a single, cloud-enabled platform that combines:

- Forwarding / FMS (air, sea, road, rail)
- Customs and trade compliance
- TMS
- WMS
- Billing and accounting

Support for 3PLs. CargoWise offers strong support for freight forwarding, customs, and multimodal transport, as well as global logistics, multiple currencies, multi-country regulatory requirements, and complex multimodal workflows. Its WMS is also tightly integrated with forwarding and customs.

Flexible and configurable, but limited customizability. CargoWise is configurable and can be extended, but in a more controlled way than Business Central:

- Business processes, screens, and documents can be tailored via built-in tools and configuration.
- Custom logic and integrations are handled primarily through APIs and eAdapter (a SOAP-based web services and integration framework).
- Less freedom for deep customization inside the core platform.

This model works well for standardizing a global logistics network. Still, the ERP functionality in CargoWise is not as robust as that of a dedicated ERP, such as Business Central, and the software is not as flexible for unique business processes as most modern ERPs, which offer open extensions and low-code platforms.

Role of ERP. While CargoWise includes billing and accounting functions, large enterprises often continue to rely on a corporate ERP (such as SAP, Oracle, or Dynamics 365) for their finance and consolidation requirements, choosing instead to integrate CargoWise as the operational logistics layer rather than the overall ERP of record. For mid-market 3PLs that want a single platform for both operations and finance, this can introduce additional integration and governance complexity.

CargoWise can be an attractive solution for organizations whose primary pain point is in multimodal transport and customs, and where warehousing is just one part of that service.

→ Oracle NetSuite: Capable ERP, but requires additional 3PL support

Oracle NetSuite is a cloud-based ERP with strong inventory management, order management, and a basic WMS. NetSuite is used by some 3PLs as their ERP backbone.

However, to match the breadth of **CargoWise** or **BC + Boltrics**, 3PLs must purchase several third-party products to provide additional capabilities to the base product, including:

- A 3PL-grade WMS (e.g., 3PL-focused ISV product)
- TMS / freight-forwarding tools
- 3PL billing and client portals via ISVs or customization

→ Acumatica: Another strong ERP contender

Acumatica is a modern cloud ERP with distribution and a built-in WMS. It has strong API support and a third-party marketplace, making it a good integration hub. For full 3PL functionality, however, Acumatica still requires:

- Advanced 3PL WMS for multi-client, complex billing
- TMS / forwarding solutions for cargo operations

3PL-centric WMS / OMS platforms

Products in this category are typically **not full ERPs** but can be very strong in warehouse and order orchestration.

Products like Logiwa IO, Extensiv 3PL Warehouse Manager, Softeon, Blue Yonder WMS, Manhattan Active WM / SCALE, and Deposco provide specialized, best-of-breed WMS/OMS platforms, but still require integration with an ERP (for example, Business Central, NetSuite, and Acumatica).

Side-by-side positioning

Functional focus

Platform	Core Heritage / Focus	Typical Role in 3PL Stack
BC + Boltrics 3PL Dynamics	ERP + 3PL WMS / TMS / FMS on Microsoft Azure	Single platform for ERP + 3PL operations
CargoWise	Freight forwarding, customs, logistics OS	Operational logistics backbone; often alongside a corporate ERP
NetSuite / Acumatica	General ERP with distribution / WMS	ERP + integrations to 3PL -grade WMS/TMS/FMS
Logiwa / Extensiv / Deposco	3PL WMS / OMS	Warehouse + order brain beside an ERP
Softeon / Blue Yonder / Manhattan	Tier-1 WMS / TMS	Best-of-breed operations with separate ERP and often separate forwarding/customs

Flexibility and customization

- **Business Central + Boltrics:** Designed for extensibility; open APIs; Power Platform, AL extensions, and Microsoft ecosystem make it easier to tailor and automate.
- **CargoWise:** Strong configuration; customizations mainly via APIs / eAdapter; less freedom for deep custom code inside the core platform.
- **Other ERPs / WMS:** Vary widely, but usually require assembling multiple products and integration layers for full 3PL coverage.

Practical considerations for ERP selection

If you're comparing ERP options for your 3PL organization, a simple way to frame the discussion is:

If you are a global freight-first 3PL / 4PL with heavy customs requirements across many countries, consider a purpose-built product that specializes in forwarding, customs, and multimodal transport with an integrated WMS, such as CargoWise. If you are a warehouse-centric 3PL (including cold chain, contract logistics, public warehousing, and e-fulfilment) that also needs a robust ERP, consider a 3PL-grade WMS / TMS / FMS plus a full ERP and broad Microsoft ecosystem support (Microsoft 365, Power Platform, Azure, and AI), such as Business Central + Boltrics.

If you are a mid-market logistics provider wanting a single, flexible business platform that can evolve with you, consider a balance of 3PL depth, ERP completeness, extensibility, and total cost of ownership without locking into a proprietary logistics silo, such as Business Central + Boltrics.

You can still position other ERPs, best-of-breed WMS, and tier-1 suites where they make sense—but for many 3PLs, especially those already invested in Microsoft's technology stack, Business Central coupled with Boltrics offers a more robust and adaptable ERP-plus-3PL foundation than a logistics-only platform.

Contact ArcherPoint by Cherry Bekaert, a Boltrics partner, to learn more about how Business Central and Boltrics can help you succeed in 3PL.

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