

[2026 EDITION]

B2B / FIELD MANUAL

PRIVATE LABEL SOURCING.

Spec Sheet.

A working B2B field manual for operators evaluating contract manufacturers. The vocabulary, the checklists, the red flags, and the contract terms — written by people who have placed the order.

FORMAT

14 pages, print-ready

AUDIENCE

Operators · founders · buyers

VERSION

2026.1 · sourcing-spec-sheet

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What you're holding.

Fourteen pages, twelve sections. Every section is a checklist a serious operator can reuse.

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Who this is for.

This document is for the operator who is one quote away from putting a real product into production and wants to stop guessing.

- **Solo founders** moving from one hero SKU to a category line.
- **DTC brands** that have outgrown their first co-packer.
- **Amazon sellers** ready to replace a private-import SKU with a domestic, branded one.
- **Retailers** (independent or chain) launching a house line on a tight calendar.
- **Operators inheriting** a half-built supply chain and trying to triage it.

If you have never bought a private-label run, this gives you the language. If you have, this gives you a checklist.

What this isn't

- Legal advice. Use an attorney for contract terms specific to your jurisdiction.
- Regulatory advice. Use a qualified regulatory consultant for FDA / FTC / state-level compliance on your specific SKU.
- A list of factories. Sourcing is a conversation, not a brochure.

Private label vs white label vs contract manufacturing.

Operators conflate these three. The factory does not. Get the vocabulary right or you will pay for the wrong thing.

PRIVATE LABEL

A manufacturer's existing, validated formula or product spec, branded to you. **You own the label and the brand; the manufacturer owns the formula.**

WHITE LABEL

Same idea, lower exclusivity. The same product is being sold under five other brand names. **You're paying for the label, not the recipe.**

CONTRACT MANUFACTURING

Custom production. You bring the formula, target spec, or development brief; the manufacturer makes it for you and only you. **Higher minimums, longer lead times, real ownership of the IP.**

Sourcing rule

Ask for the spec sheet of the version you're being quoted. If the manufacturer cannot produce one for you on day one, you are buying white label, not private label. Price accordingly.

How to scope a product brief.

A complete brief is twelve fields. Anything missing is a quote you can't trust.

#	FIELD	WHAT GOES IN
01	Form factor	Capsule, tablet, gummy, powder, liquid, cream, lotion, beverage, bar, soft chew, kibble. Specify size and serving format.
02	Target retail price	Drives target landed cost. Without it the factory guesses.
03	Target landed cost	Per-unit goal in your currency, ex-warehouse, including packaging.
04	MOQ tolerance	Minimum you can stomach for first run, second run, and steady state.
05	Lead time tolerance	Calendar weeks from PO to landed inventory.
06	Packaging tier	Stock vs custom, primary plus secondary plus tertiary.
07	Label print method	Pressure-sensitive, shrink sleeve, direct-to-bottle, carton.
08	Certifications required	GMP, NSF, USDA Organic, Kosher, Halal, Non-GMO, Vegan, Gluten-Free.
09	Regulatory class	Dietary supplement, cosmetic, food, beverage, OTC drug, animal feed.
10	Allergen profile	What must be in, what must be out, shared-line tolerances.
11	Country of manufacture	Domestic-only, allowed, or required for the channel.
12	Channels	DTC, Amazon, retail (specify chain), international.

If a manufacturer quotes you without all twelve, the quote is fiction.

MOQ economics.

The manufacturer's MOQ is not arbitrary. It is the number at which their batch math works.

TIER	PROFILE	PER-UNIT COST
5,000 units	Stock-formula private label, off the existing line, custom label only. Realistic for capsules, simple liquids, basic creams.	Highest
10,000 units	Custom label and custom packaging tier. Modest formula tweaks possible.	Drops 15-30%
25,000 units	Custom formula territory. Dedicated batch. Longer lead time, higher cash exposure.	Lower
50,000+ units	Full contract manufacturing economics. Real margins. Real warehouse bills.	Lowest

Cash math operators forget

At **25,000 units and a \$4 landed cost**, you wrote a \$100,000 check before the first sale. Every step up doubles your cash exposure.

RULE

Match MOQ to your selling speed, not your ambition. A factory's lowest per-unit cost is irrelevant if your inventory turns are wrong.

Certifications cheat sheet.

Buyers ask for these constantly. Half of them are confused. Here is what each actually means.

cGMP (Current Good Manufacturing Practice)

FDA's manufacturing standard for supplements (21 CFR Part 111) and food (21 CFR Part 117). The factory has it or it doesn't. Required for legal supplement production. Audited by FDA or third-party (NSF, USP, NPA).

NSF Certified for Sport

Tested batch-by-batch for banned-in-sport substances. Costs the factory; differentiates the SKU for athlete-targeted brands.

USDA Organic

Certified by an accredited certifier (CCOF, OTCO, QAI). The facility holds the certification, not just the ingredient. If the co-packer isn't certified organic, your finished product cannot be labeled organic.

Kosher / Halal

Kosher: OU, OK, Star-K, KOF-K. Halal: IFANCA, ISA, IFSA. Each has its own cost and audit cadence. Often required for retail and international.

Non-GMO Project Verified

Marketing certification, but heavily expected at natural-channel retail. Adds \$0.05-\$0.20 per unit.

FDA REGISTERED ≠ FDA APPROVED

a free, mandatory listing for any food, supplement, or drug facility. Means almost nothing on its own.

reserved for drugs and certain medical devices. Supplements, foods, and cosmetics are **never "FDA approved."** A manufacturer who tells you they are is either lying or confused. Walk.

Packaging questions to ask before a sample run.

Packaging fails kill more launches than formula fails. Before sampling:

- What's the lead time on primary packaging at our quantity?
- Who owns the dieline once we pay for design?
- What's the minimum print run on the labels?
- Tamper-evident method: shrink-band, induction seal, or both?
- What's the shelf-life claim on this packaging? (Glass vs HDPE vs PET vs aluminum changes it.)
- Compatibility test: did anyone confirm the formula doesn't react with the chosen container?
- Print proof process: digital, hard-copy, or press check?
- Who pays for the first run if the proof is wrong?
- Sustainability claims: PCR percentage, recyclability code, FSC paperboard?
- Secondary packaging: cartons, shrink-wrap, master case count?
- Shipping test: did this configuration pass an ISTA-3A drop test?

The cost of asking these is one email. The cost of not asking is a pallet of unsellable inventory.

Red flags in a manufacturer's first email.

Patterns that show up in week one and predict the next eighteen months.

SIGNAL	WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS
No spec sheet attached	They want you to commit before you can compare.
MOQ "depends"	A serious factory has a number for each format.
No COA examples	If they don't have one to show you, they don't run them routinely.
"FDA approved" anywhere in the email	Either deception or ignorance. Disqualifying.
Pricing without quantity tiers	They have not done the batch math.
Won't disclose the manufacturing facility	Brokers wearing a manufacturer's coat. Ask: who runs the line?
100% upfront with no milestones	Fine for samples. Not fine for production.
No sample policy	If they won't ship a sample, they don't want a real customer.
English-only contract for an offshore facility	Get the original-language version too.
No insurance information	Product liability is mandatory. So is freight insurance.

Contract terms checklist.

Before you sign, the document needs to answer all of these in writing.

- Who owns the formula? You, the manufacturer, or shared?
- If shared, what's the buy-out price for full ownership?
- Exclusivity: category, geography, duration?
- Minimum annual volume to maintain exclusivity?
- Payment schedule: deposit, mid-production, pre-shipment, net?
- Lead time guarantee with named consequence for missing it?
- Quality spec: written, with pass/fail criteria, with named test methods?
- Reject policy: defect tolerance, who pays, replace or refund?
- Recall policy: who pays, who notifies retailers, reverse logistics?
- IP assignment: artwork, label files, dielines, proprietary processes?
- Termination clause: notice, paid-up inventory, formula handover?
- Force majeure: pandemic-tested language, not 2018 boilerplate?
- Governing law and venue?
- Insurance: product liability minimum, additional insured naming?
- Audit right: can you, or your QA partner, walk the facility?
- Escalation path: named contacts on both sides, response SLAs?

If any of these are blank, your contract is a wishlist.

Lead time reality check.

A realistic timeline for a 10,000-unit private-label run, domestic facility, custom packaging:

WEEK	MILESTONE
0	Brief locked.
1-3	Sample produced.
3-5	Sample approved, packaging proofed.
5	PO issued, deposit wired.
5-9	Raw materials sourced (if not stock).
6-9	Production scheduled.
9-11	Manufacturing run.
11-12	QA, COA, batch release.
12-13	Packaging applied, secondary cartoning.
13	Shipped from facility.
14-15	Landed at fulfillment partner.

Adjust for reality

- Add **4-8 weeks** for an offshore facility.
- Add **2 weeks** for any custom certification audit.
- Add **unknown weeks** for any single-source raw material.

The factory is not lying when they say "ten weeks." They are quoting the production block. The fourteen weeks is the real number.

Sample run / first PO checklist.

Before you wire the deposit on a first production run, this list should be done.

- Final formula approved in writing, with version number.
- Final label artwork approved, with version number, print-ready files archived.
- Dieline approved for primary, secondary, and tertiary packaging.
- COA template agreed: which assays, which methods, which acceptance ranges.
- First-run quantity confirmed in writing.
- Per-unit price confirmed in writing, with tier table for re-orders.
- Lead time confirmed in writing with delivery week.
- Payment milestones defined: deposit %, balance %, terms.
- Shipping terms defined: EXW, FOB, DDP, who books, who insures.
- Receiving party named, with address and contact.
- Sample retention agreed: how many units pulled per batch, retained how long.
- Recall plan acknowledged in writing.
- Liability insurance verified, certificate on file.

| If you wire money before this list is complete, you are buying surprise.

What goes wrong on the second order.

The first order is on the factory's best behavior. The second order is the real relationship. Watch for these:

Price creep

Raw material "increase" you can't verify. Ask for invoices.

Lead time creep

Eight weeks becomes twelve. Eventually fourteen. Document it; renegotiate.

Spec drift

A "minor" change to a stabilizer, a sweetener, a coating. Demand notification.

Assay drift

Active ingredient on the COA reads at the bottom of the acceptance band, run after run. That's a tell.

Packaging substitution

A bottle is "out of stock" so they used a similar one. Reject the run.

Slow communication

Replies that took a day now take five. The factory is busy with someone bigger.

New point of contact

Your project manager is "moved to another account." Get the new one's name and confirm spec ownership transferred.

FIX

A short, written quarterly review. Two pages. Both signatures. It puts the relationship back on the rails.

Sourcing landscape — categories we cover.

We source manufacturers across four categories. Each has its own rhythm.

SUPPLEMENTS · I-01

Capsule, tablet, gummy, powder, liquid, soft chew. cGMP-required. MOQs 1,000-25,000 depending on format. Lead times 8-14 weeks domestic. Watch for assay-band drift.

COSMETICS & SKINCARE · I-02

Serum, cream, cleanser, color, sunscreen, body care. ISO 22716 expected; FDA monograph compliance for SPF. MOQs 1,000-10,000 stock; 5,000-25,000 custom. Watch for packaging-formula compatibility.

FOOD & BEVERAGE · I-03

Functional drinks, snack bars, powders, ready-to-mix. SQF or BRCGS-certified facilities for retail. MOQs higher (10,000-50,000). Watch for shelf-stability validation and pasteurization spec.

PET CARE · I-04

Supplements, treats, grooming. AAFCO-aligned facilities for ingestibles. Margin-rich vertical with smaller incumbents. MOQs 2,500-10,000. Watch for state-by-state label compliance.

Next move.

If you read this far, you are not the buyer who ends up with a pallet of unsellable inventory. You are the buyer who runs the checklist and signs the right contract.

When you are ready to scope a real brief

We are at privatelabelsupply.com/quote/.

We charge a flat sourcing fee per SKU and a small spec retainer. You pay the factory directly. We don't take a percentage of your sales, ever.

HOW WE WORK

30-min brief call → 3-manufacturer match within 7 business days → sample-run brokerage → signed spec → production tracked → goods landed at your fulfillment.

If you only want the next conversation

privatelabelsupply.com/contact/

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