



The European 3PL Market

A brief analysis of eyefortransport's recent survey

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I. Introduction

The 2008 edition of our annual European 3PL Market Report reflected an industry on the brink of major changes. Published in September 2008, the report highlighted the expansion of the previous year, and the sense of foreboding about the months to come. This year's report reveals the consequences of what did happen within and around the logistics industry that year, and demonstrates just how different the mindsets of both 3PLs and 3PL customers are compared to a year ago.

What's on the mind of logistics executives is the economy, and the biggest question mark is over the shape of recovery, when things will turn a firm corner, and how to take advantage when the time comes. With an increasingly stable environment to do business in, being in a position to gain market share is crucial, since things can rise as quickly and spontaneously as they fell. Solid and up to date industry data is thus more important than ever, and having a sense of the optimism or pessimism of major market players is a key insight into the collective conscience that will be among the first indicators of major changes.

With this in mind we asked respondents how the economy is continuing to affect their business and their relationships, when they expect real, stable growth to occur, and how they are preparing for a rebound. Some of the biggest players in the industry revealed to us how they're minimising risk, what their strategic plans for recovery are, and where they see the biggest opportunities arising in an increasingly stable market.

As always we went in-depth into the reasons for non-renewal of 3PL contracts, comparing the views of those on either side of the bargaining table. We then probed the manufacturer and retailer logistics executives who use 3PLs to find out how their priorities have changed, and whether pricing pressure has eclipsed issues such as the environment, cargo security, etc. The results are surprising, especially where the opinions of 3PLs and their customers diverge sharply.

It's a key moment in the relationship between 3PLs and their users. The bargaining strength of shippers on the one hand, and the changing 3PL business models on the other, mean that links among industry members are being tested. The business decisions executives in this industry make this year will affect their business for the next decade and beyond, and we hope this year's annual study will shed light on these decisions and their rationale.

All of the major themes in this report will be discussed and debated by 3PLs and 3PL users at eyefortransport's **7th European 3PL Summit** in Brussels this 24-25 November, 2009. The European 3PL Summit is Europe's largest supply chain gathering focused on how 3PLs & supply chain practitioners can work together to best manage supply chains. It continues to be an essential meeting place for executives who need up to date and accurate insight into the industry.

For more information on the report or the Summit please contact Katharine O'Reilly, Senior Vice President of Research at koreilly@eft.com or visit the website at www.3PLsummit.com/eu



II. Methodology and Approach

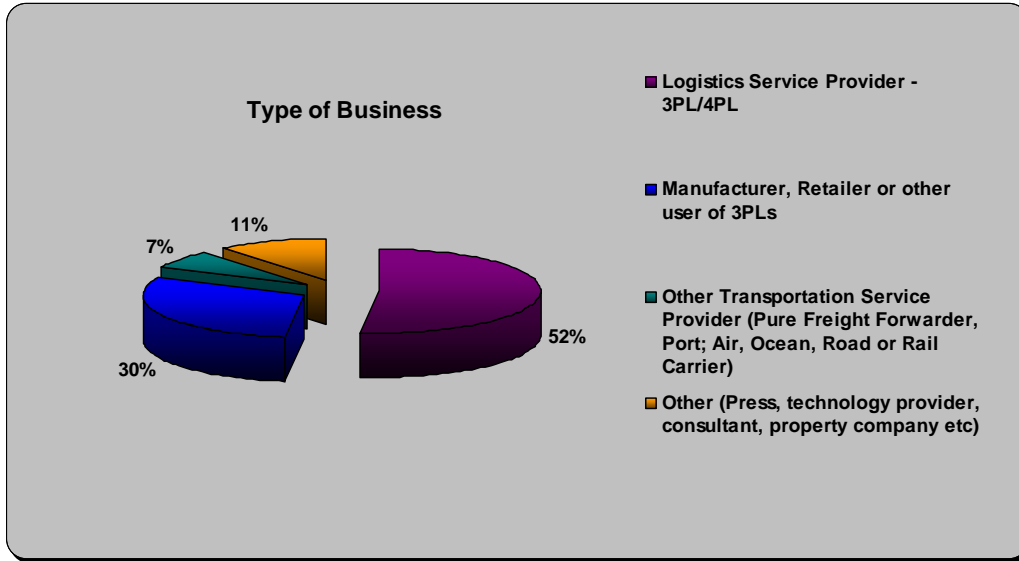
This survey was conducted in June and July 2009 with responses solicited by targeted e-mail lists, select trade association memberships, various related-industry databases and other targeted methods. No individual responses were analysed, but rather all responses were consolidated.

The aim of the survey was to identify the main challenges for European 3PLs and 3PL users, as well as the best potential opportunities in the different geographical regions, and the impact on operations of the global economic downturn.

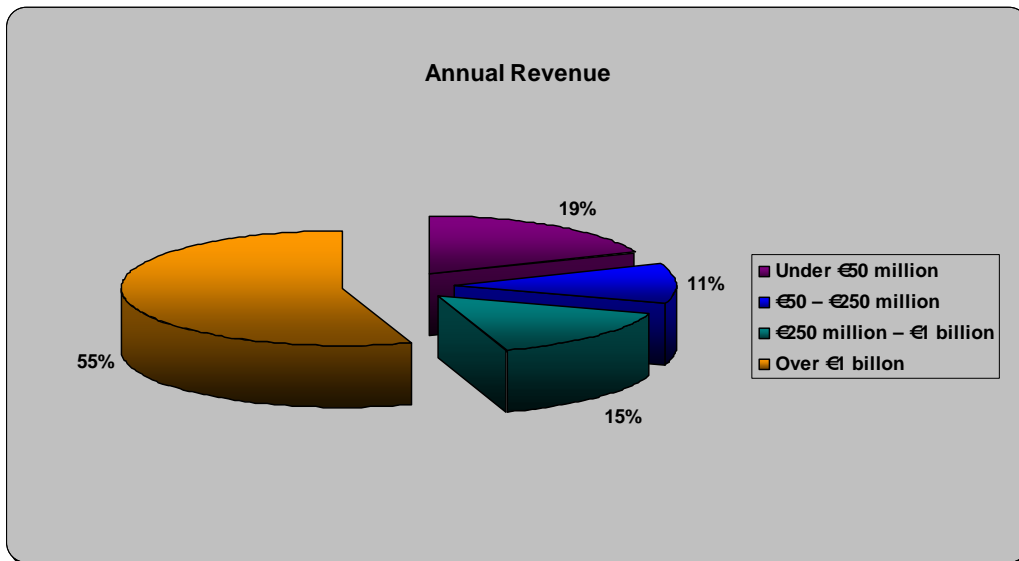
Respondents were asked a number of questions to establish the key criteria for choosing a 3PL as well as the main reasons for non-renewal of 3PL contracts. It is interesting to see the difference between what is important to the client and what the 3PL thinks are the clients' priorities.

III. Profile of Respondents

Over 120 logistics professionals from 3PLs, freight forwarders, carriers, warehouse operators, shippers, consultants and technology providers responded to the survey. The majority of respondents (52%) represented 3PL or 4PL companies, with 30% representing users of 3PL or 4PL companies.



55% of the respondents targeted represented companies whose annual revenue exceeded €1 billion, 15% represented companies with annual revenues between €250 million and €1 billion, 11% represented companies with annual revenues between €50 million and €250 million, and 19% represented companies with annual revenues below €50 million.





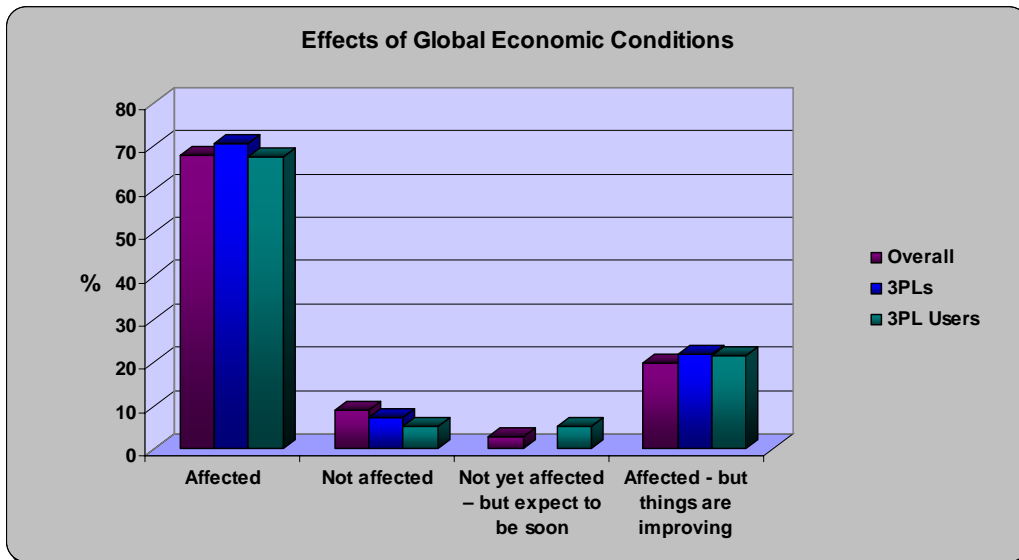
IV. Impact of the Economic Downturn

We asked all respondents whether they were experiencing the economic slowdown within their business operations. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority from all groups replied that they were. Response patterns overall, and between 3PLs and their customers, were very similar. 71% of 3PLs said they are currently being affected by the economic downturn, compared to 68% of 3PL users and 68% across all respondents. This is markedly higher than last year's results, which saw 39% of respondents reporting being affected.

Although the number of companies affected has increased sharply this year there are some positive signs, as the next most common response in this year's survey was that respondents had been affected but are now seeing things improve. 20% of respondents replied in this manner, with 22% of both 3PLs and their users replying this way.

9% of respondents reported that they had been unaffected by the economic downturn, with 7% of 3PLs being unaffected and 5% of 3PL users being unaffected. Only a small minority (3%) of respondents said they were not currently affected but expect to be soon. None of the 3PLs responded this way, though 5% of their customers did. These numbers are much smaller than in last year's survey, where 30% of respondents reported that they were unaffected, and 31% reported that they were not affected but expected to be soon.

Overall, this year's findings show that the economic downturn has affected the majority of companies. Very few unaffected companies are expecting to become affected and a number of companies are now reporting to be improving, having previously been affected. This indicates that the economic downturn has reached its maximum range and that the first shoots of recovery are beginning to show.



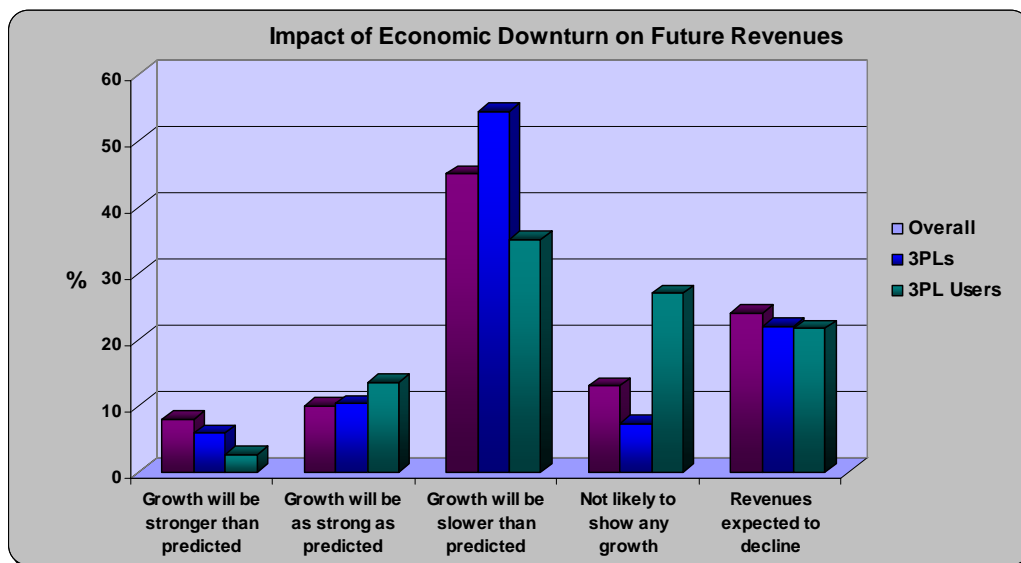


When asked how worldwide economic conditions will affect financial performance in the next 12 months, the majority expect to see growth in their revenues. Only 8% of respondents expect growth to be stronger than previously predicted, with 6% of 3PLs and 3% of 3PL users responding in this way. 10% of respondents expect growth to be as strong as previously predicted, with 10% of 3PLs and 14% of 3PL users responding in this way. The most common response from respondents (45% overall) was that they will see growth but at a slower rate than previously predicted. This response saw a noticeable difference between the answers of 3PLs (54%) and 3PL users (35%).

Another noticeable difference in response patterns came from those who reported that they do not expect to see any growth (13% overall), where only 7% of 3PLs responded in this fashion as opposed to 27% of 3PL users. Responses that revenues are expected to decline were similar amongst those asked, with 24% of respondents answering this way and 22% of both 3PLs and their users doing so.

Overall, the worldwide economic conditions are expected to negatively affect predictions for revenues over the coming 12 months. The effect is of a similar magnitude for both 3PLs and their users, with 84% of both groups expecting revenues to grow at a slower rate than predicted (or even decline), and only 16% of both groups expecting revenues to be as strong, or stronger, than predicted.

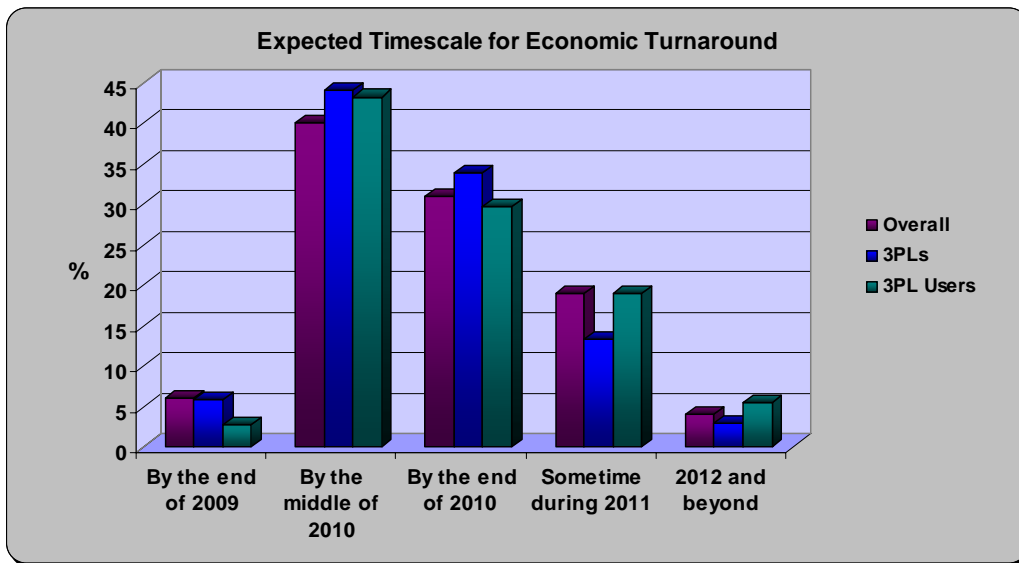
These results show a marked difference to those in last year's survey, where economic conditions were not expected to have as big an effect on revenues as they are this year, and where there was a noticeable difference in the response from 3PLs and their users. In last year's survey, 72% of 3PLs expected revenues to grow at a slower rate than predicted (or decline), and 28% expecting revenues to be as strong, or stronger, than predicted. In contrast, only 59% of 3PL users expected revenues to grow at a slower rate than predicted (or decline), and 41% expected revenues to be as strong, or stronger, than predicted. This indicates that revenues were harder hit for 3PLs than their users last year, but that the playing field has become open this year.





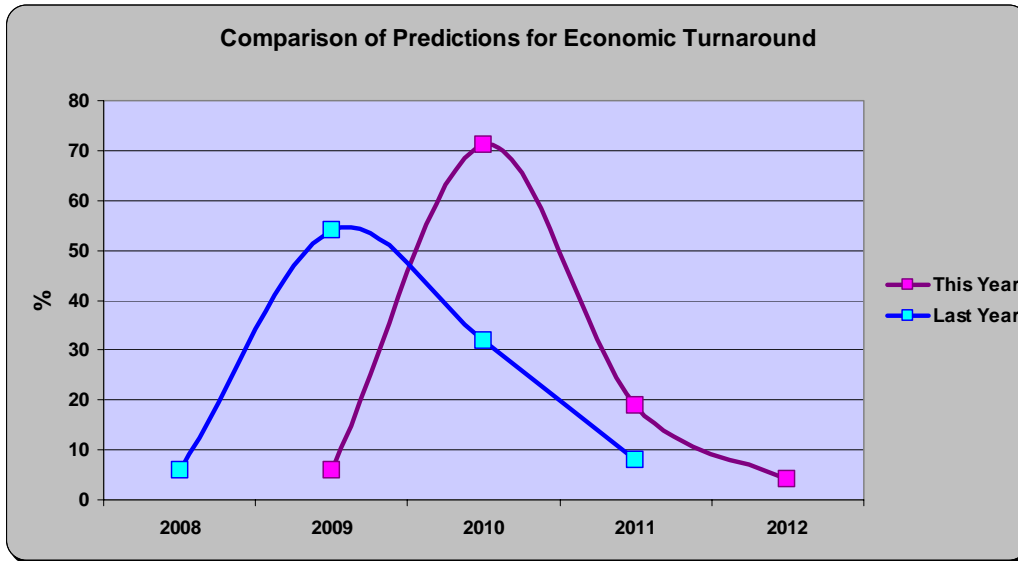
When asked for a timescale when the global economy will turn-around and begin to show significant growth, the majority of respondents replied that it would occur at some stage during 2010. Of those responses, 40% expected the turn-around to occur by the middle of 2010 (44% for 3PLs and 43% for 3PL users), and a further 31% expected it to occur by the end of 2010 (34% for 3PLs and 30% for 3PL users).

The next most common response from respondents was that the turn-around would occur at some stage during 2011, with 19% of respondents answering this way (13% for 3PLs and 19% for 3PL users). Only 6% of respondents thought the turn-around would occur by the end of 2009 (6% for 3PLs and 3% for 3PL users), and only 4% of respondents thought the turn-around would occur by 2012 or beyond (3% for 3PLs and 5% for 3PL users). Results were broadly similar, though 3PLs were slightly more optimistic for the timescale of recovery than 3PL users (a trend also seen last year).



Compared to this year, predictions for the timescale of the economic turn-around were more optimistic in last year's survey. There was a remarkably similar distribution of responses, albeit with last year's response pattern being one year earlier than this year. The majority of people this year (71%) expect a turn-around during 2010, while the majority last year expected it during 2009 (54%). The 2nd most common response this year (19%) was for a turn-around during 2011, while the 2nd most common response last year was for a turn-around during 2010 (32%).

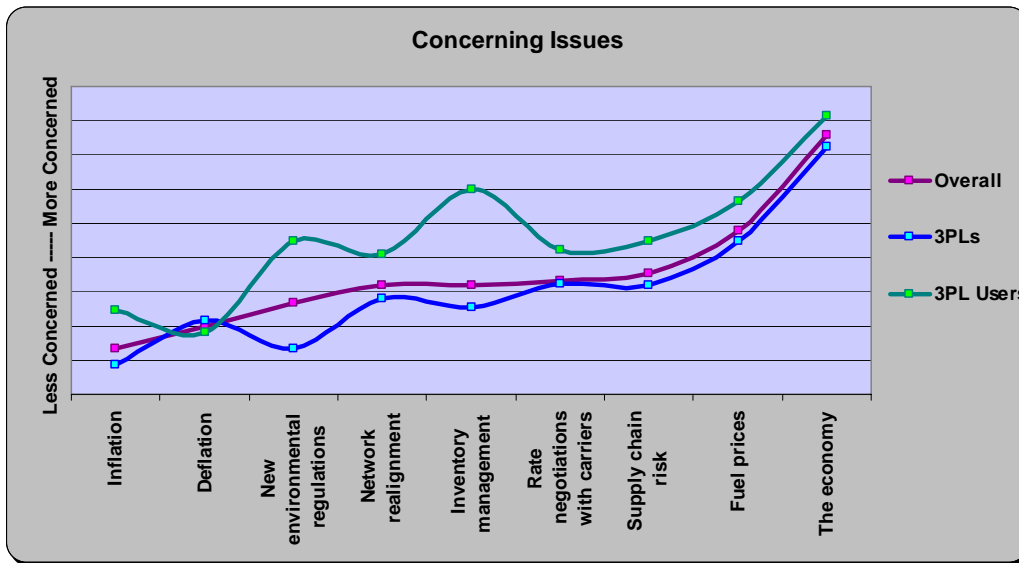
Although the response patterns have been similar in both years, there was a noticeably higher percentage expecting an earlier turn-around in this year's survey than there were last year (71% compared to 54%). Despite the possibility that this year's predictions may be overly optimistic (as last year's were proven to be), the increase in respondents expecting an earlier turn-around could indicate that a recovery is closer.



Many concerning issues were highlighted in the survey, foremost of which was the economy. 36% of 3PLs were very concerned with the economy, 34% were concerned, and 18% were somewhat concerned. For 3PL users, 32% were very concerned, 52% were concerned, and 11% were somewhat concerned.

Fuel prices were seen as the second biggest concern overall, 13% of 3PLs were very concerned, 39% were concerned, and 26% were somewhat concerned. For 3PL users, 28% were very concerned, 33% were concerned, and 17% were somewhat concerned.

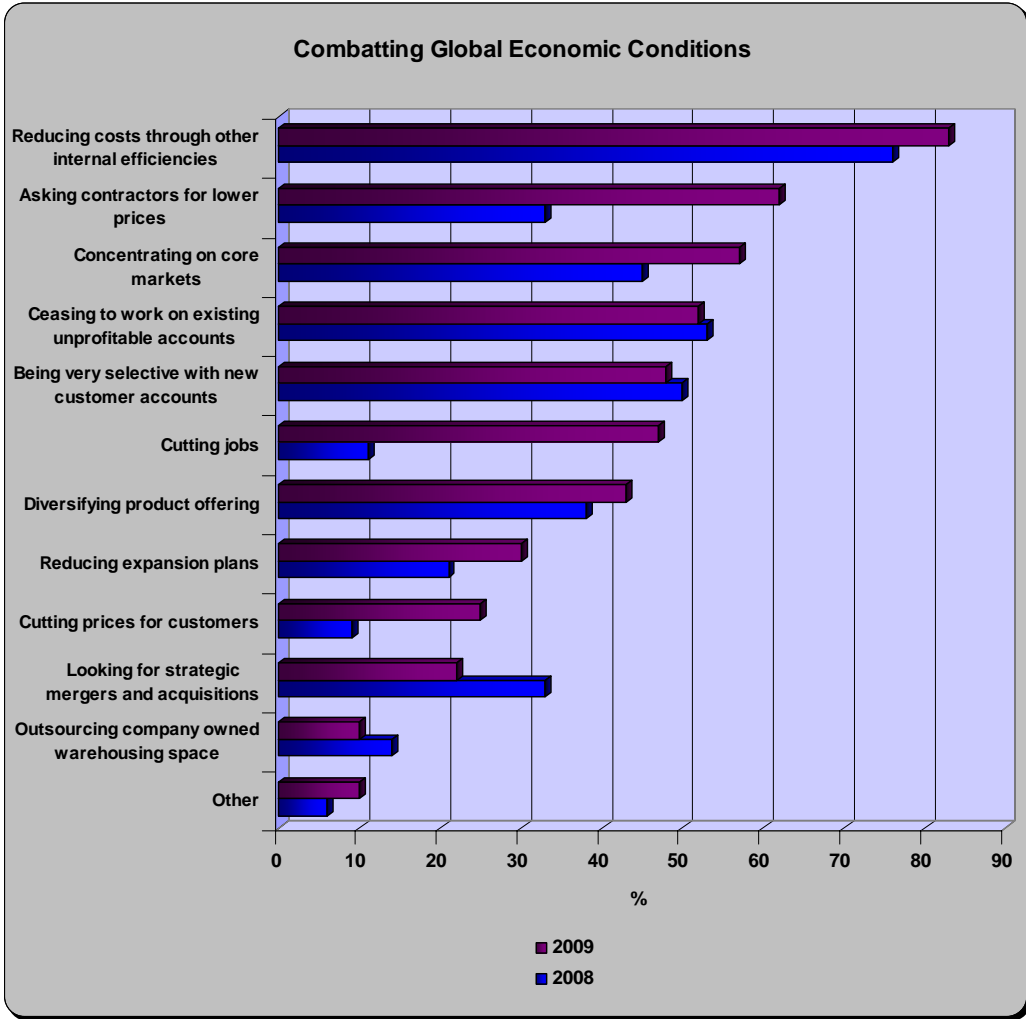
The next most pressing concerns were supply chain risk, rate negotiations with carriers, inventory management, and network realignment. All of these issues have a similar importance level overall for 3PLs, but were of a greater significance to 3PL users. Inventory management saw the biggest discrepancy between 3PLs and their users, with 9% of 3PLs being very concerned and 22% being concerned, compared with 22% of 3PL users being very concerned and 41% being concerned. New environmental regulations also saw large discrepancies, with 4% of 3PLs being very concerned and 19% being concerned, compared with 11% of 3PL users being very concerned and 38% being concerned. Inflation and deflation were less of a concern overall, though inflation was more concerning for 3PL users than for 3PLs.



We asked respondents representing 3PLs what measures they are taking to combat the challenging global economic conditions. Asking contractors for a lower price has been a tactic for 62% of respondents, a marked increase from the 33% of respondents who replied the same way in last year's survey. Concentrating on core markets (57%), ceasing to work on existing unprofitable accounts (52%), and being very selective with new customer accounts (48%) were also commonly adopted strategies, all of which showed similar popularity in last year's survey.

The next biggest change since last year's findings was the increase in the number of companies choosing to cut jobs. 47% of respondents reported doing so this year, as opposed to only 11% in last year's survey. Diversifying product offering (43%) was another popular choice, while reducing expansion plans (30%), cutting prices for customers (25%), and looking for strategic mergers and acquisitions (22%) were less popular but still notable. Cutting prices for customers also showed a notable change since last year's survey, when only 9% of respondents were taking this action.

Outsourcing company owned warehousing space was only adopted by 10% of respondents this year, though 83% of respondents were reducing costs through internal efficiencies other than those mentioned above. On the whole, a far greater number of measures are being undertaken by companies this year as compared to last year, no doubt a result of the increased number of companies affected by the economic downturn.





V. Comparing Opinions of 3PLs and their Customers

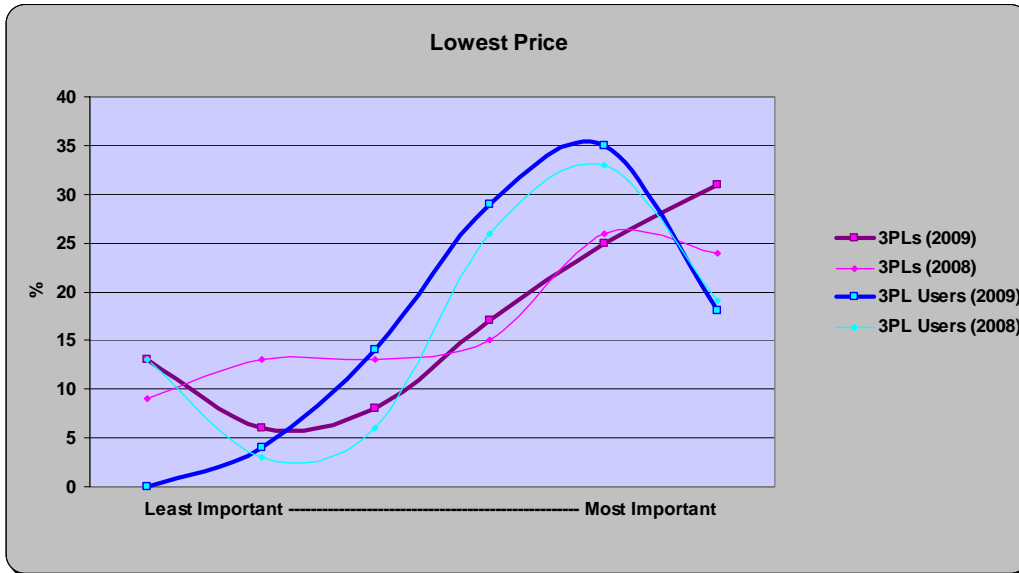
In the survey, the users of 3PLs were asked a series of questions highlighting what they look for when choosing a new 3PL. Similar questions were also aimed at the 3PLs, asking what they thought their customers looked for.

The factor that held the most importance for 3PL users was the best quality of service, with 53% saying it was the most important factor and 23% saying it was very important. The distribution of replies was remarkably similar to those in last year's survey, with a fractionally larger emphasis towards greater importance. 46% of last year's respondents chose it as the most important factor, with 21% reporting it as a very important factor.

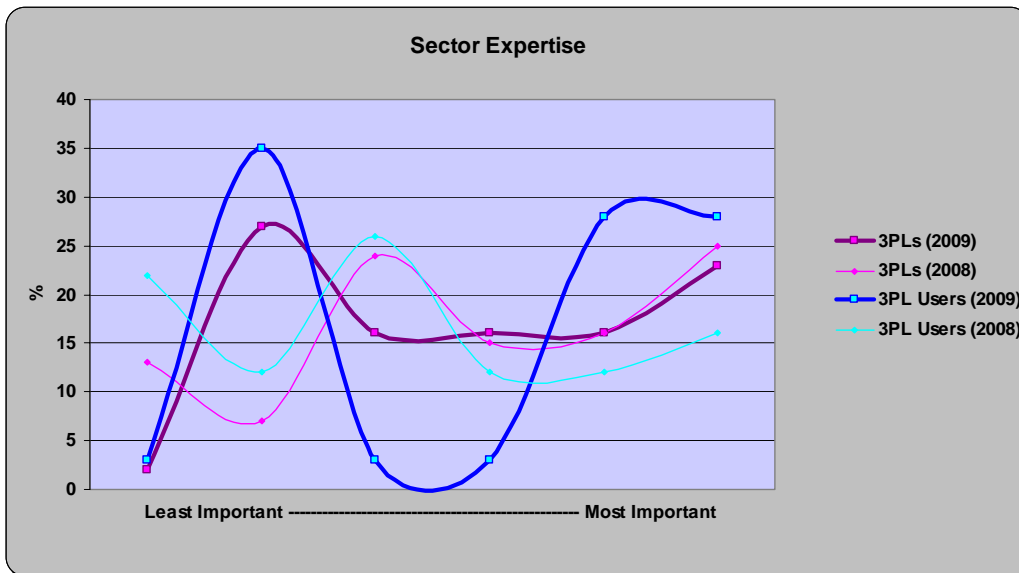
When the 3PLs were asked how important they thought quality service was for their customers, only 31% thought it was the most important factor, though a further 27% chose it as a very important factor. This still made service quality the most popular option from the 3PLs, as it was last year with 28% of respondents deeming it the most important factor, however both years' 3PL totals for service are only marginally higher for than for lowest price. From this it is clear that 3PLs see service quality and price as being of equivalent importance for their customers, while their customers place greater importance on service than cost.



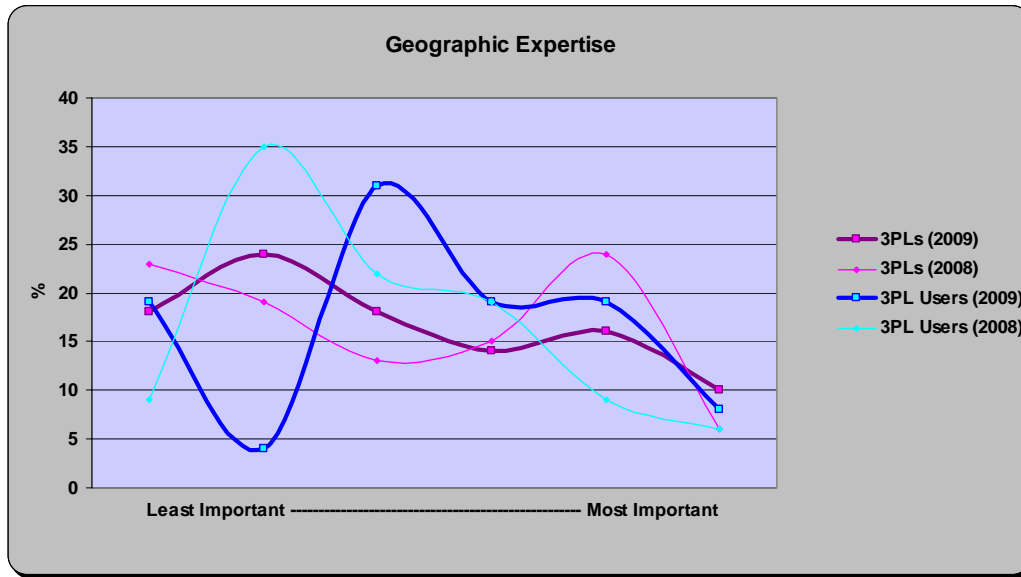
31% of 3PLs selected lowest price as being the most important factor for their customers and a further 25% selected it as a very important factor. Whilst this is almost the same as the importance allocated to quality service by 3PLs, fewer than half of their customers allocated it the same importance (18% selecting lowest price as most important, compared to 53% for quality service). A sizeable number (35%) of 3PL users deemed lowest price as being a very important factor (33% in last year's report), meaning it is certainly one of the key considerations when choosing a 3PL.



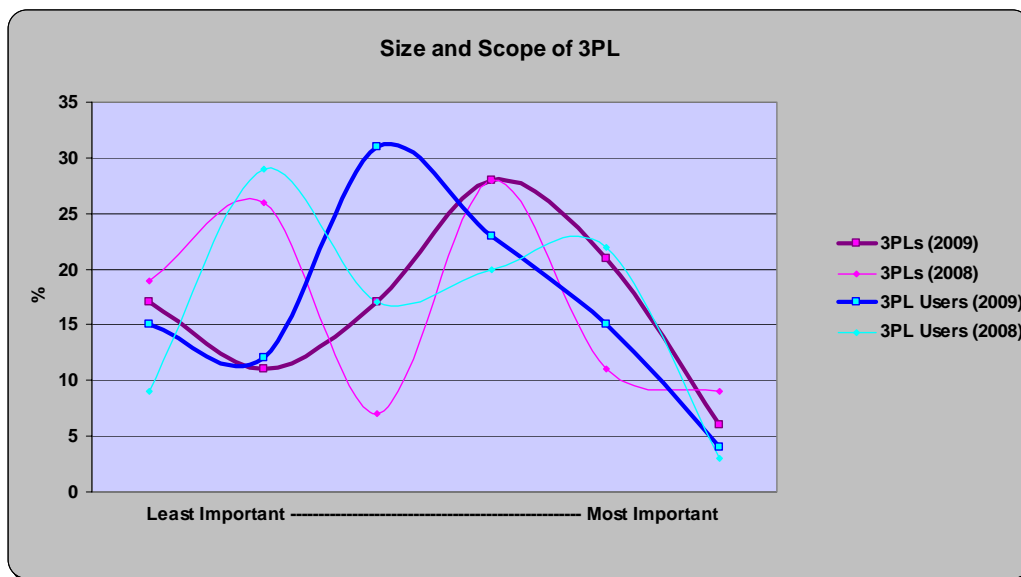
Sector expertise was also seen as a key consideration by customers of 3PLs, however the popularity of this option was not as clear cut as for service and cost. While a notable 28% of 3PL users considered it as being the most important factor and very important, a more sizeable 35% of respondents consider it not a very important factor. The division of opinion on the subject of sector expertise is further emphasised by only 3% of respondents deeming it as being either important, somewhat important, or least important. Opinion was also divided on this topic in last year's survey, and is also so in the results from 3PLs, both this year and last.



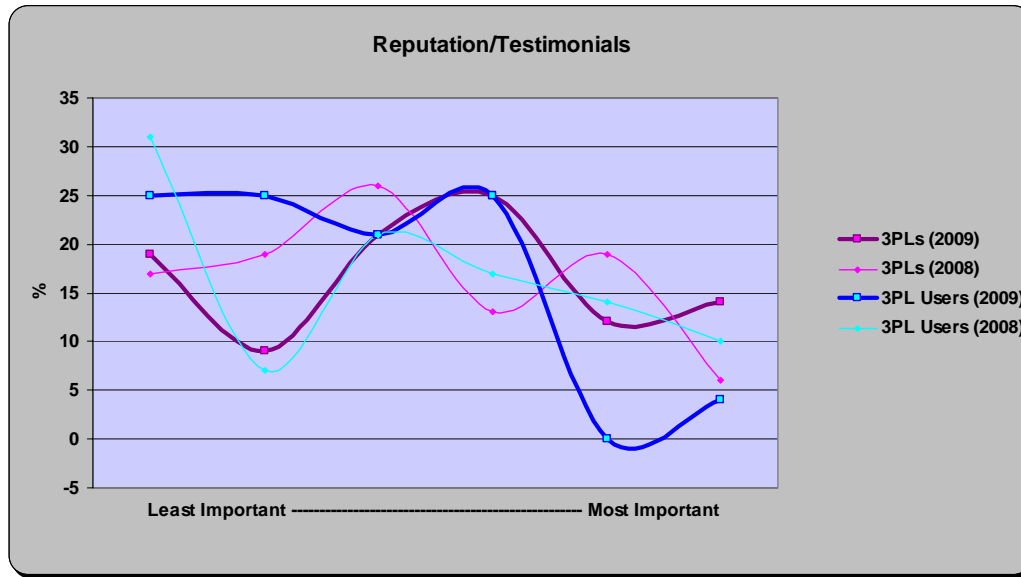
Geographic expertise was seen as a consideration by the majority of 3PL customers, although 19% did see it as the least important factor. Similar results are seen in both years for 3PLs and their customers. Generally, it is seen as considerably less of a factor than service and price, but only of marginally less importance than sector expertise.



The size and scope of the 3PL was seen as a consideration by most both this year and last, though a higher number of respondents (15%) deemed it of least importance compared to 4% who deemed it of most importance. As with geographic and sector expertise, the size and scope of the 3PL is seen as a consideration by most customers, but not a key one.



Reputations and testimonials for 3PLs was largely seen as an unimportant factor by their customers, 25% deemed it least important, a further 25% deemed it not very important, 21% saw it as only slightly important and 25% saw it as important. Only 4% deemed it the most importance factor, while 0% saw it as being very important. These numbers contrast quite a bit from the opinions of 3PLs, who placed much greater emphasis on the importance of reputation and testimonials. 14% of 3PLs saw them as being the most important factor, and a further 12% saw them as being very important.



In contrast to the questions regarding what customers look for when choosing a new 3PL, respondents were also asked for the main reasons why customers fail to renew 3PL contracts.

Alternative 3PLs offering cheaper prices was identified as the biggest reason, both by 3PL users (51%) and by 3PLs (70%). Both sets of respondents saw this as a bigger reason than last year, when 38% of 3PL users and 55% of 3PLs chose it. Both years saw 3PLs overestimate the importance of alternative 3PLs offering cheaper prices as a reason for non-renewal of contracts.

Inefficient management by 3PLs (45% for 3PL users compared to 33% for 3PLs), alternative 3PLs offering a better service (43% for 3PL users compared to 37% for 3PLs), cost “creep” (43% for 3PL users compared to 28% for 3PLs), hidden costs (37% for 3PL users compared to 37% for 3PLs), and loss of logistics innovation capacity (37% for 3PL users compared to 35% for 3PLs) were seen as important reasons by both groups, though with a general tendency towards underestimation by 3PLs.

Large overestimations were made by 3PLs regarding the importance of poor service (selected by 53% of 3PLs compared to 31% of 3PL users) and relationship management issues with 3PLs (selected by 52% of 3PLs compared to 17% of 3PL users).

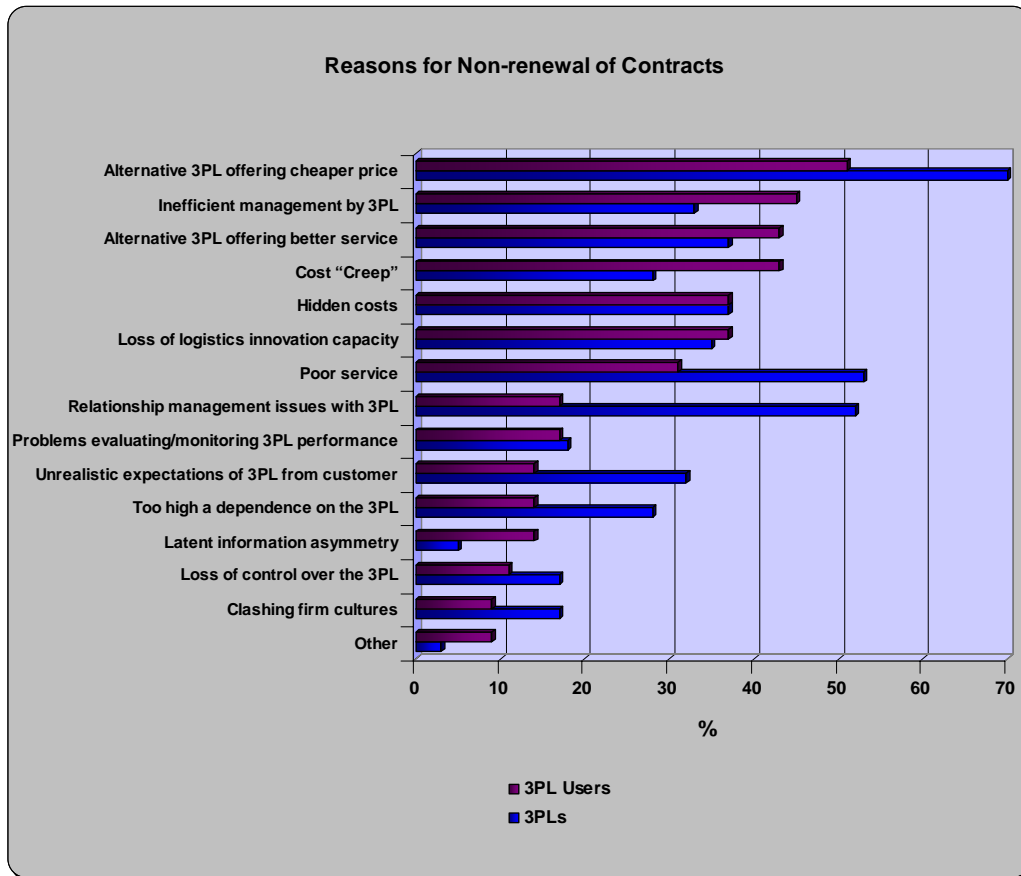
It is interesting to note that 3PL customers saw alternative 3PLs offering a cheaper price as a more important reason than because they are unhappy with their current 3PLs costs, and that alternative 3PLs offering a better service was a more important reason than because they felt they have had poor service from their current 3PL.

Problems evaluating/monitoring 3PL performance (17%), unrealistic expectations of 3PL from customer (14%), too high a dependence on the 3PL (14%), latent information asymmetry (14%), loss of control over the 3PL (11%), and clashing firm cultures (9%) were not seen as important reasons by many 3PL users,



although unrealistic expectations of 3PL from customer (32 %) and too high a dependence on the 3PL (28%) saw a significant overestimation in their importance by 3PLs.

The biggest changes since last year's survey were seen in the importance to 3PL customers of alternative 3PLs offering cheaper price (51% this year compared to 38% last year) and poor service (31% this year compared to 54% last year). Overall, cost was seen as a bigger reason for non-renewal of contracts than service, in contrast to the results showing the greater emphasis placed on service when customers chose a new 3PL.



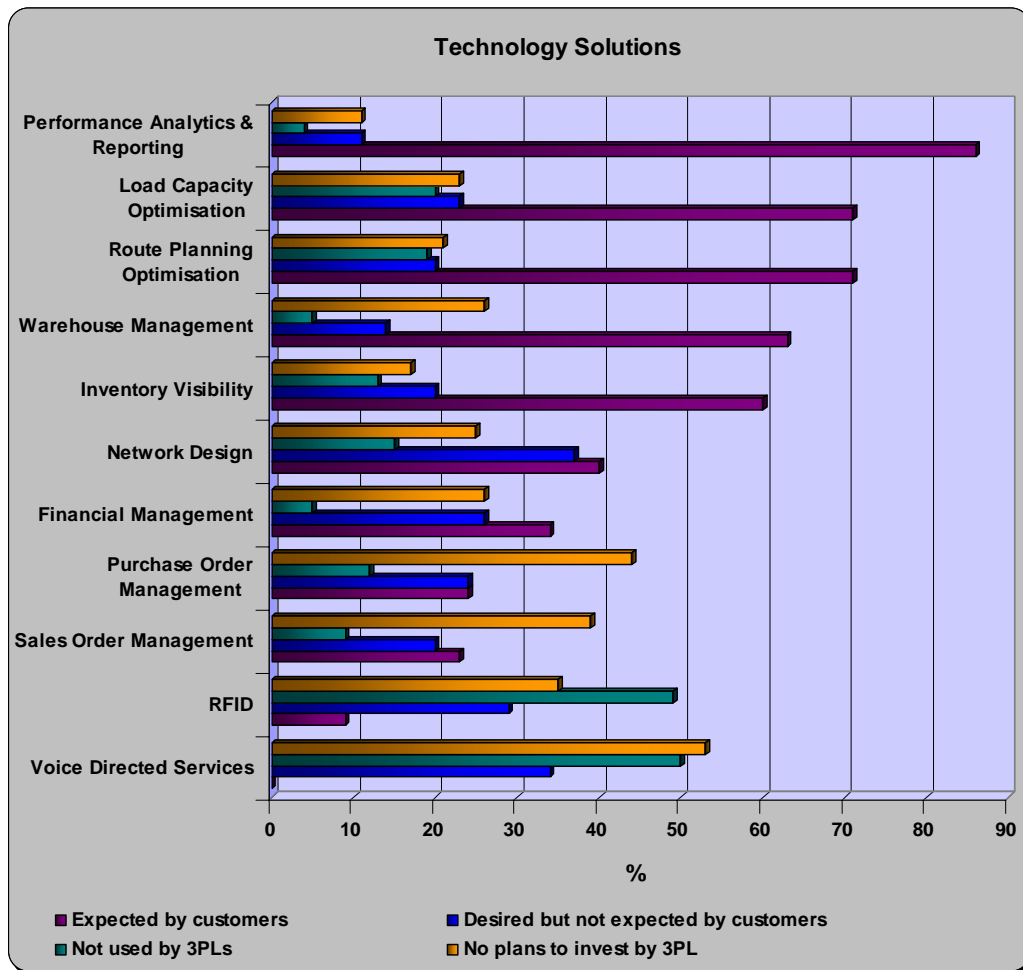
Performance analytics & reporting was the technology that was most expected by customers of 3PLs. 86% of 3PL users expected their 3PLs to offer this, and a further 11% desired it but did not expect it. This is understood by 3PLs as only 4% of them do not currently use performance analytics & reporting, and only 11% of 3PL respondents have no plans to invest further in it.

A larger discrepancy was seen with load capacity optimisation (expected by 71% and desired by 23% of customers) and route planning optimisation (expected by 71% and desired by 20% of customers), both of which saw a higher number of 3PLs failing to use them and not planning to invest. 20% of 3PLs are not using load capacity optimisation and 23% have no plans for future investment, while 19% of 3PLs are not using route planning optimisation and 21% have no plans for future investment.



Warehouse management and inventory visibility were other commonly expected technologies by 3PL users, being expected by 63% and 60% respectively, and being desired by 14% and 20% respectively. A difference between them seems to be that 3PLs have more awareness of the expectations for warehouse management (not used by 5% and no plans to invest in it by 26%) than for inventory visibility (not used by 19% and no plans to invest in it by 21%).

Overall, a general trend can be seen as expectations for a technology decrease by customers, the numbers of 3PLs failing to use or invest in that technology increases. This is unsurprising, though there are certain technologies which deviate from the trend more so than others. While a lack of awareness by 3PLs of the expectations by their customers for load capacity optimisation and route planning optimisation has already been shown, there has been a tendency by 3PLs to spend more effort than necessary on financial and sales order management solutions.

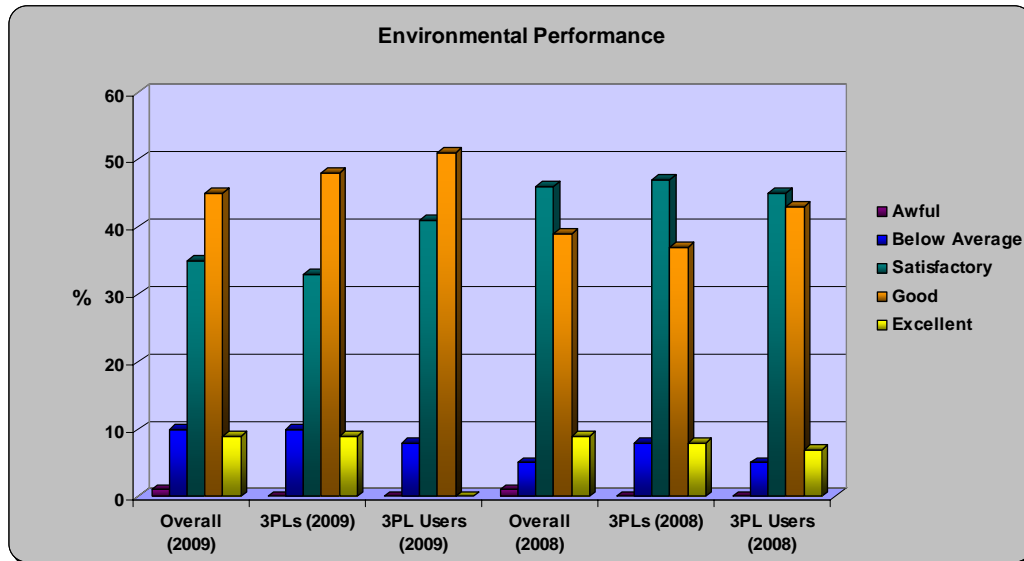


The final comparison undertaken in the survey was between how 3PLs and their customers rate their own environmental performances. There was very little difference between the answers of 3PLs and their users this year. 1% overall felt



their performance was awful (0% for 3PLs and 0% for 3PL users). 10% overall felt their performance was below average (10% for 3PLs and 8% for 3PL users). 35% overall felt their performance was satisfactory (33% for 3PLs and 41% for 3PL users). 45% overall felt their performance was good (48% for 3PLs and 49% for 3PL users). 9% overall felt their performance was excellent (9% for 3PLs and 0% for 3PL users).

Last year's results also showed a very similar distribution in answers from 3PLs and their users, however the overall pattern was different than it was this for year. Last year saw the majority of responses reporting that their company's environmental performance was satisfactory, with a sizeable proportion saying their performance was good. In contrast, this year saw the majority of responses being that their performance was good, but although a smaller number felt their performance was just satisfactory, a larger number also felt their performance was below average. This indicates a division between the environmental performances of companies, undoubtedly a result of the economic downturn, so that while some companies are seeing their environmental performance improve, others are paying less attention and seeing it fall.



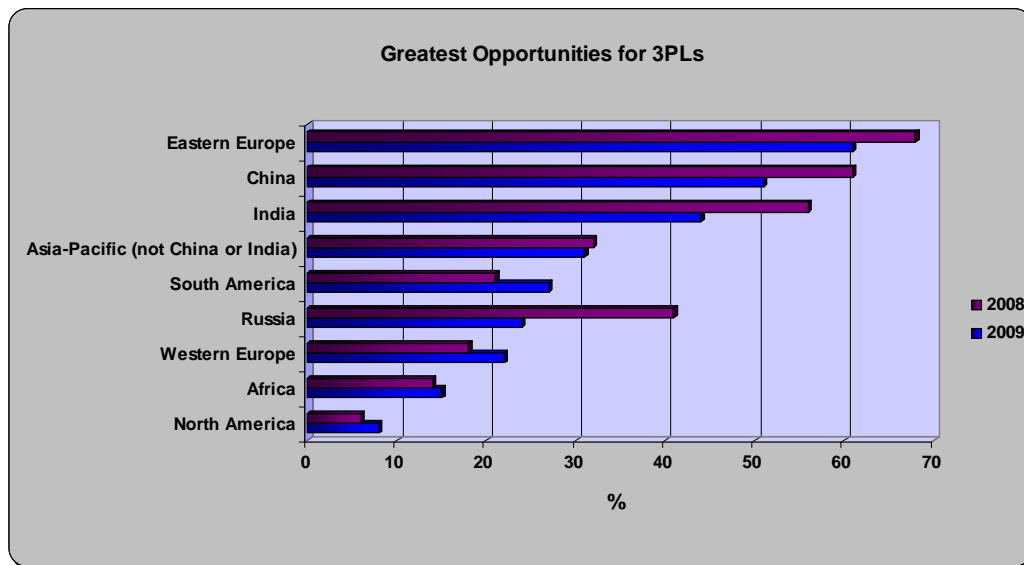
VI. 3PL Views



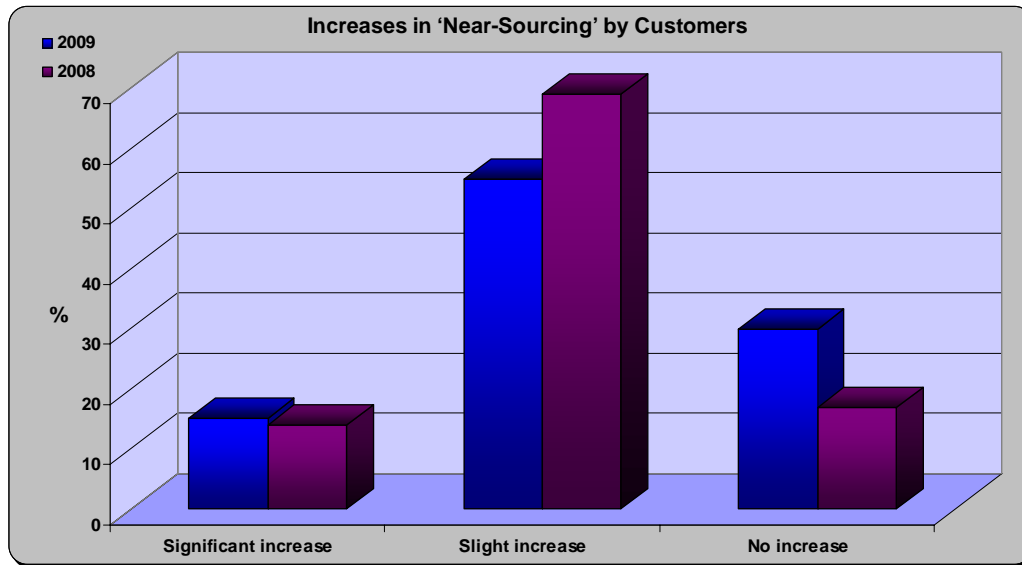
A number of the survey's questions were targeted specifically towards 3PLs. The first asked which geographic region they foresaw the greatest opportunities in. Eastern Europe was the most popular response both this year (chosen by 61% of respondents) and last year (chosen by 68% of respondents). China and India were, respectively, the second and third most common responses, however as with Eastern Europe, they both saw a drop in the number of responses they received last year.

Russia was the fourth most popular response in last year's survey, but it was ranked sixth in this year's results. Last year, 41% of respondents saw the greatest opportunities in Russia, but this total fell to 24% this year.

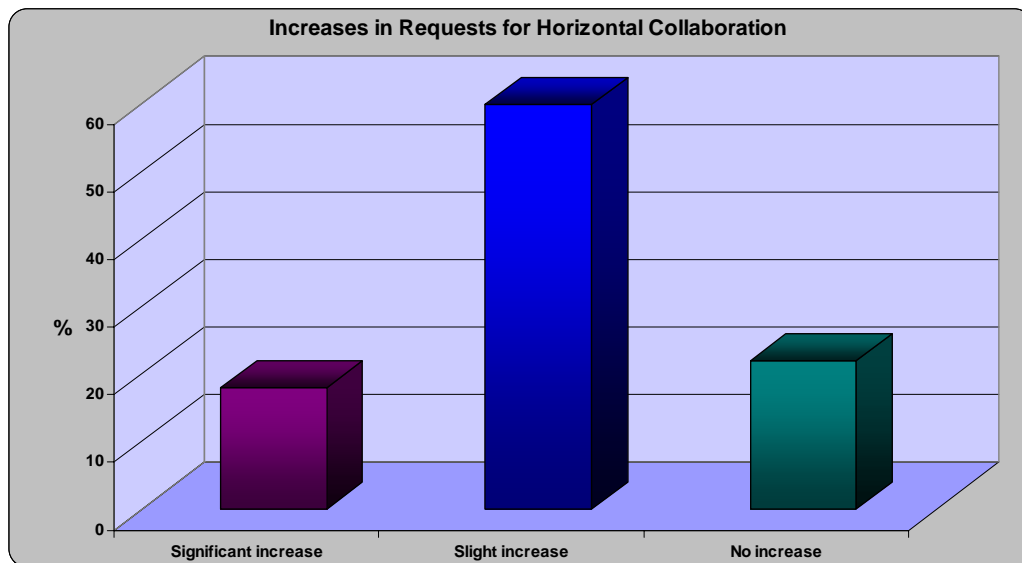
The Asian and Pacific regions were the fourth most popular response this year, having maintained a similar level to last year. South America, Western Europe, Africa, and North America were fifth, seventh, eighth, and ninth respectively, but all showed an increase in the number of responses they received in last year's findings.



The survey also asked 3PLs whether they had seen an increase in the amount of 'near-sourcing' from their customers. Overall, the numbers fell from last year's findings. While an extra 1% saw a significant increase in the amount of 'near-sourcing' this year (15% in 2009 compared to 14% in 2008), 14% fewer saw a slight increase (55% in 2009 compared to 69% in 2008). At the same time, 13% more saw no increase in the amount of 'near-sourcing' (30% in 2009 compared to 17% in 2008).

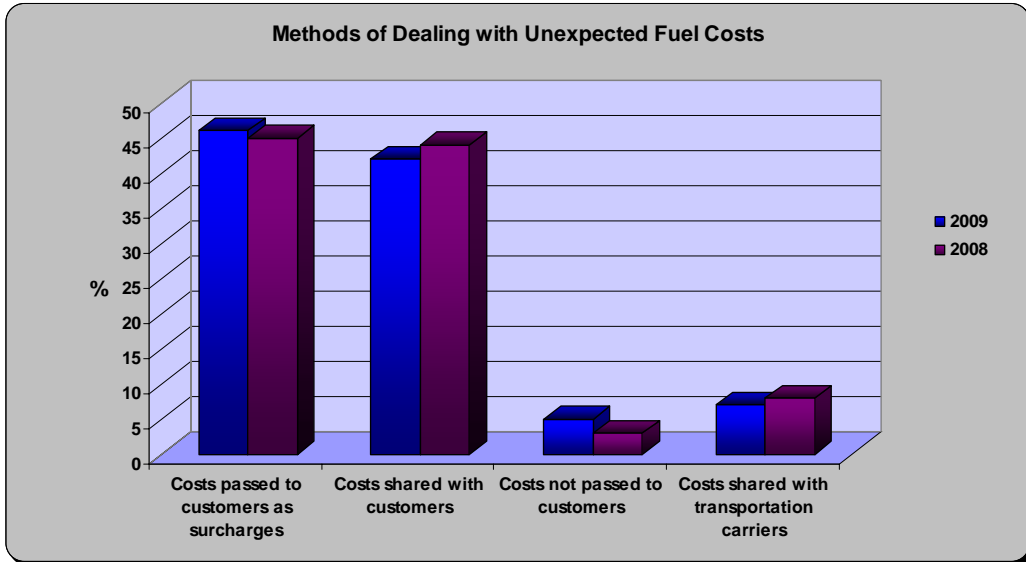


When asked about increases in requests for horizontal collaboration between 3PL customers and other companies (including sharing capacity and similar trade lanes), the majority of respondents (60%) have seen a slight increase. There was little difference between those seeing a significant increase (18%) and those seeing no increase (22%).

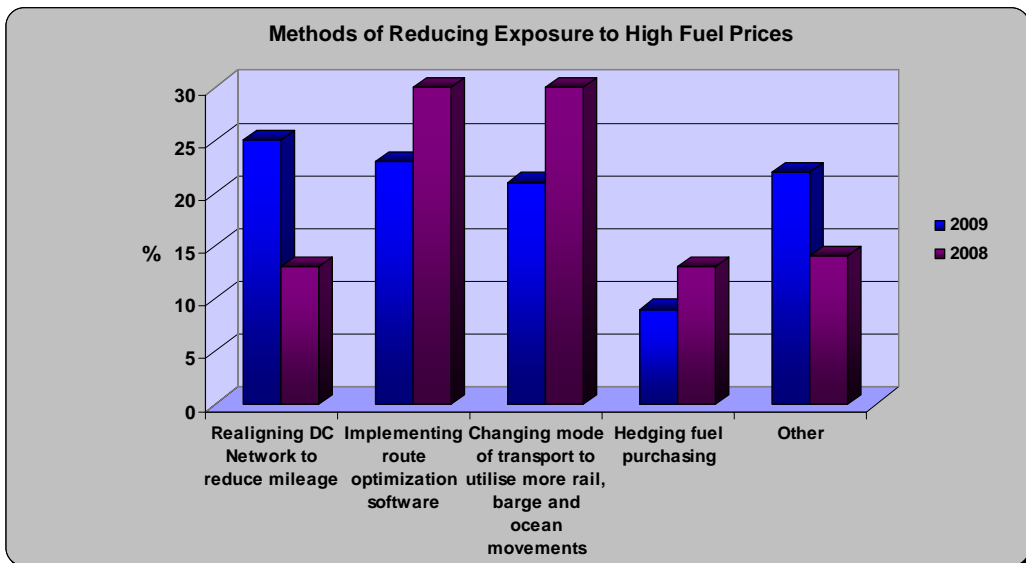


3PL respondents were also asked about their methods of dealing with unexpected costs due to rising fuel prices. The vast majority, in both this year and last, either pass on extra costs to customers as surcharges or share the extra costs with them, while the minority either don't pass on their costs or look to share them with their transportation carriers.

While last year saw very little difference between the numbers of respondents passing costs on to their customers (45%) and those who shared costs with their customers (44%), this year saw a slight increase in the gap as 46% passed on costs and 42% shared them.



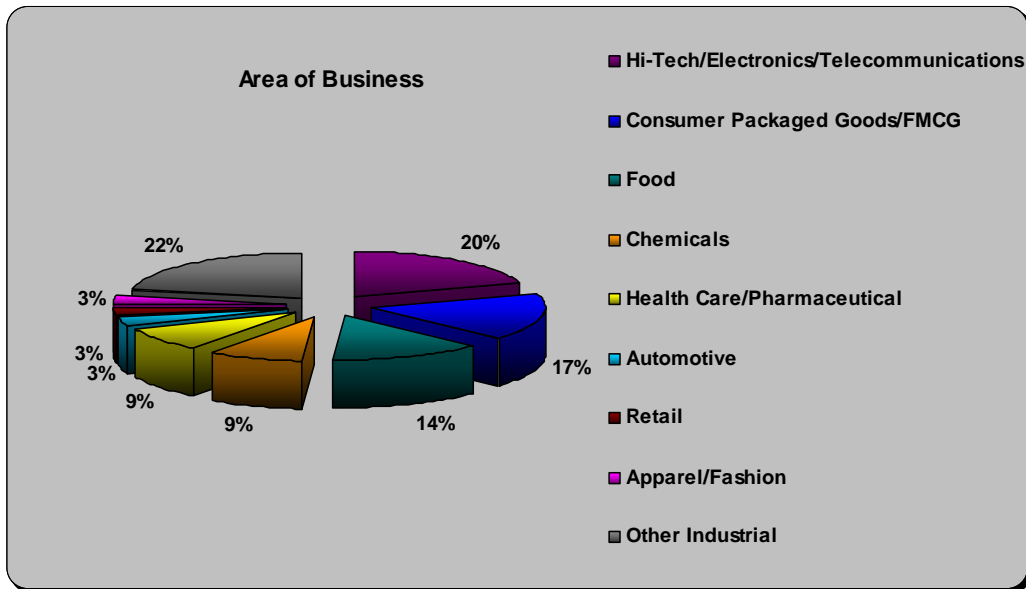
Results varied more dramatically from last year's when looking at methods of reducing exposure to high fuel prices by 3PLs. There was little difference this year between the three most popular responses, realigning DC Network to reduce mileage (25%), implementing route optimization software (23%), and changing mode of transport to utilise more rail, barge and ocean movements (21%). Last year implementing route optimization software and changing mode of transport to utilise more rail, barge and ocean movements (both 30%) were by far the most popular two responses, with realigning DC Network to reduce mileage only receiving 13% of the responses.



VII. 3PL User Views

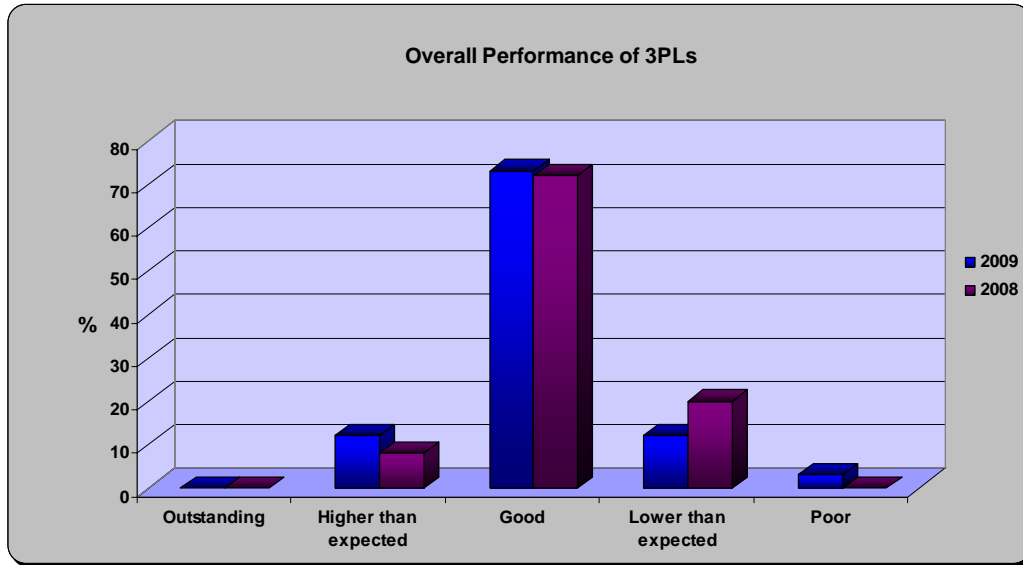
A section of the survey questions were aimed only at 3PL customers. The respondents represented a broad range of markets, though hi-tech / electronics / telecommunications (20%), consumer packaged goods / FMCG (17%), and food (14%) were the most notable in number.

The chemical and healthcare / pharmaceutical industries were each represented by 9% of respondents, while automotive, retail, and apparel / fashion each has 3%.



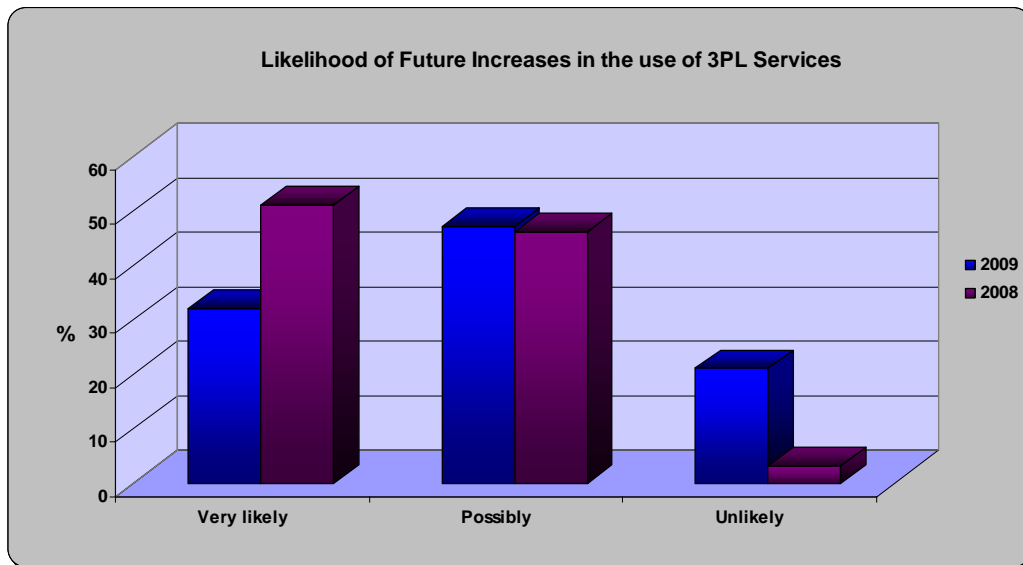
When asked to rate the overall performance of their current 3PL, none of the respondents rated it as being outstanding, either this year or last. The majority of respondents thought their 3PL's performance was good, with the 2009 total of 73% being very similar to 2008's result of 72%.

This year's survey saw an equal number (12%) of respondents rating their 3PL's performance as either higher than expected or lower than expected. This varies from last year's results, which saw 8% rating the performance as higher than expected and 20% rating it as lower than expected. This year's survey also saw 3% of respondents rating their 3PL's performance as being poor, though overall results were slightly higher for 2009 than for 2008.

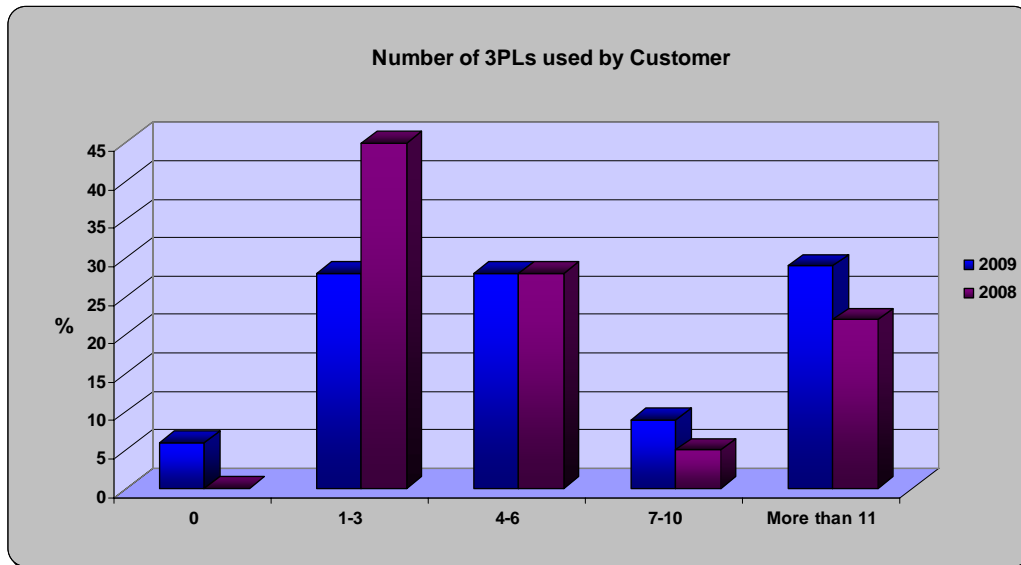


When looking at the possibility of 3PL customers increasing their future use of 3PL services, the majority thought it was either very likely (32%) or likely (47%). 21% did feel it was unlikely, a notably higher number than the 3% of respondents feeling that way last year.

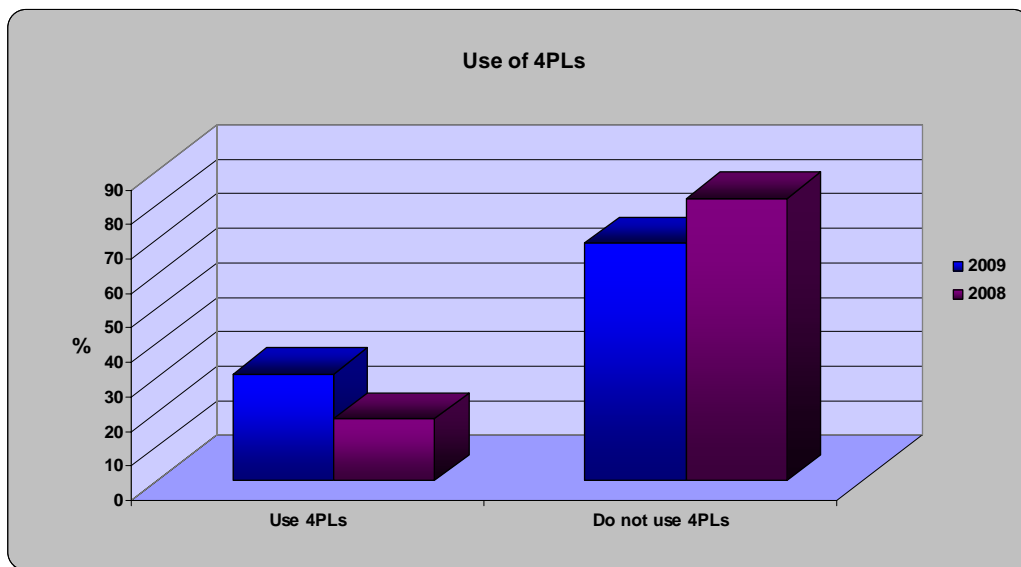
Last year saw a much higher number (51%) of respondents predicting the very likely probability that their use of 3PL services would increase, while the number seeing it as likely (46%) was very similar to that in this year's survey.



The reduction of predictions for increased use of 3PL services by customers could be a reaction to an increase in the numbers of 3PLs being used by customers. While last year saw the majority of respondents using between one and three 3PLs, this year saw fewer in that category and a greater number using 7 or more 3PLs.



The final question asked of 3PL users was regarding their use of 4PLs. 31% of this year's respondents reported that they are currently using 4PL services, a notable increase from the 18% responding that way in last year's survey.



VIII. Conclusions

The changes experienced by the logistics industry over the last year have affected the business models of 3PLs, and the supply chain strategies of their customers, in a serious and long-term way. As pricing pressure continues and the race to recover ahead of the market heats up, the need for strong, reliable and innovative business partners increases.

Increased collaboration and interesting new business models will emerge, and the shape of the industry will never be the same. Success in this new and unknown environment requires thinking and acting today, and staying ahead of the game through solid research into the latest technologies and strategies to achieve short and long term growth goals.

For more information on how 3PL CEOs and senior supply chain practitioners are adapting to change and preparing for a profitable rebound, check out the cutting-edge, research driven agenda for the **7th European 3PL Summit** at www.3PLsummit.com/eu

IX. About the sponsors

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