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The Seven-Seat Vendor Table — Suppliers a Plant Needs

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You do not need 400 parts suppliers; you need seven seats filled: one account supplier for the long tail, each critical maker's parts channel, one local stockist, the certificate authority, one forwarder, the vetting tools, and your own maintenance planner. The certificate ladder, the 30-day plan, and what each seat fixes.

The short answer

A procurement officer asked to cut parts cost, cut friction and keep supply stable needs seven relationships, each with one job. We call it the seven-seat vendor table.

One account supplier for the long tail: mixed-brand parts by part number, with certificates, on one vendor record. This is the seat cballast.com is built for.
The parts channel of each critical equipment maker: maker-only, warranty-bound and class-approved parts.
One local stockist: same-day breakdown cover.
The body that governs your certificates: class societies such as DNV, ABS, Lloyd's Register, Bureau Veritas, RINA and ClassNK; independent inspection companies such as SGS, Intertek and TÜV.
One freight forwarder with a consolidation point.
The discovery and vetting tools: Europages, Kompass and Thomasnet for supplier search; ShipServ and Procureship for fleets; company registers for checks.
Your own maintenance planner, who owns the part numbers everything else runs on.

Fill seat 1 first. It removes the most vendors, the most purchase orders and the most certificate chasing in one move.

1. Where the cost actually is

Unit price is the smallest lever on a parts budget. The larger ones:

Vendor count. Every supplier is an onboarding, a master-data record, a payment run and an audit line. The usual rule of thumb: roughly 80% of suppliers carry roughly 20% of spend.
Purchase orders per line. Forty lines to forty vendors is forty POs, forty deliveries and forty invoices.
Freight per line. A parcel per part regularly costs more than the part.
Over-specified certificates. A 3.2 where a 3.1 meets the requirement, or class certificates on items class never asked for.
Breakdown premiums. Paid when a part everyone knew would wear out was never put on a list.
False competition. One list sent to many resellers often returns several quotes from the same distributor shelf with stacked margins: five quotes, one warehouse. More names on the bid list is not more competition.

Friction and instability come from the same sources. Fewer, better-defined supplier relationships fix all three at once.

2. The seven seats

Seat | Who to talk to | What it fixes |

1. Account supplier for the long tail | cballast.com | Vendor count, PO count, identification hours, certificate chasing |
2. Maker's parts channel | The maker or its appointed agent, one per critical equipment family | Maker-only, warranty and class-approved parts; lifecycle notices |
3. Local stockist | One industrial supplier within driving distance | Same-day breakdowns |
4. Certificate authority | DNV, ABS, Lloyd's Register, Bureau Veritas, RINA, ClassNK; SGS, Intertek, TÜV | Which items need which certificate; independent inspection where required |
5. Forwarder | One freight forwarder with a consolidation point; the ship's agent for vessels | Freight per line, customs paperwork, delivery reliability |
6. Discovery and vetting tools | Europages, Kompass, Thomasnet; ShipServ, Procureship; brreg.no, Companies House, VIES | Finding candidates for seats 2, 3 and 5; checking any new vendor in ten minutes |
7. Your maintenance planner | The owner of your CMMS or ship's maintenance system | Part numbers, intervals and quantities: the data every other seat depends on |

Seat 1: the account supplier for the long tail. The long tail is thousands of part numbers from hundreds of makers, most bought once or twice a year. No maker's channel wants it as one order and no local stockist holds it. It is where vendor count explodes, so it is where one well-chosen account does the most work. cballast.com is built for this seat: a catalogue indexed by part number, quoted as mixed-brand lists, with certificates stated per line and account terms that reward repeat business. Section 5 gives seven questions to ask any candidate for this seat, with our own answers.

Seat 2: the maker's parts channel. Talk to the regional parts desk or appointed agent for each equipment family that can stop your operation. Ask for a discount structure against your installed base, committed lead times on your critical spares, and lifecycle notices sent before a phase-out, not after. Ask which lines in their service kits are made to their own drawing. The rest are standard components (the two-kit rule) and belong in seat 1.

Seat 3: the local stockist. One supplier close enough to collect from. You pay this seat for minutes, not for margin, so do not run it on price. Agree what it holds for your critical machines and how to reach it out of hours.

Seat 4: the certificate authority. Most over-specification exists because nobody asked. Sit down once with your class surveyor, notified body or inspection company and settle which item families need which document. Write the answer into the purchasing specification. Independent inspection earns its fee on high-value lines and 3.2 requirements, and nowhere else.

Seat 5: the forwarder. One forwarder, one consolidation point, a fixed shipping rhythm. Suppliers deliver to the hub; the hub ships one box a week to the plant, or to the ship's agent at the next port. This is where freight per line disappears.

Seat 6: the discovery and vetting tools. Directories (Europages, Kompass, Thomasnet) and, for fleets, procurement marketplaces (ShipServ, Procureship) are for finding candidates. Registers are for checking them: brreg.no in Norway, Companies House in the UK, VIES for EU VAT numbers. A directory listing is not a qualification. Check the legal entity, the bank account's country, the stated condition of goods and certificate availability before the first order.

Seat 7: your maintenance planner. No supplier can stabilise a process that starts with a description. The planner holds what makes every other seat work: part numbers with every suffix, service intervals, installed quantities. Interval times installed base is next year's demand. That list, with annual quantities and required documents per line, is the standing list.

3. The certificate ladder: specify the lowest rung that meets the requirement

Document | What it is | Enough for |

CoC or EN 10204 2.1 | Maker's statement that the goods comply with the order. No test results | Non-critical, non-pressure items |
EN 10204 2.2 | Statement with test results from the maker's routine inspection, not necessarily from your batch | General mechanical parts |
EN 10204 3.1 | Results from the delivered batch, validated by the maker's inspection representative, who is independent of production | Pressure-containing and material-critical parts |
EN 10204 3.2 | As 3.1, also validated by the buyer's representative or an independent inspector | Where the specification or a regulator demands independent witness |
Class or type approval | Product approved by a classification society | Where class rules require it on board |
MED wheelmark | Conformity with the EU Marine Equipment Directive | Safety, fire, life-saving, navigation and pollution-prevention equipment on EU-flag ships |
ATEX / IECEx | Equipment certified for explosive atmospheres | Zoned areas |

Three rules:

Specify per line, not per PO. A blanket "3.1 on everything" prices certificates onto washers.
Ask before ordering. A 3.1 belongs to a batch. It often cannot be produced after the fact.
Take the lowest rung that meets the requirement. Every step up removes sources and adds lead time.

4. By company type

If you are | Documents usually worth specifying | Where the saving usually sits |

Ship owner or ship manager | Class certificates where class rules require them, MED wheelmark on safety and pollution-prevention equipment, maker's CoC on the rest; IMPA codes for stores | One account for technical spares across the fleet; one box to the agent instead of a parcel per line |
Water or wastewater utility | EN 10204 3.1 on pressure parts, national drinking-water approvals on wetted materials, ATEX around digesters and biogas | Standing list for seals, bearings, instrumentation and dosing spares; declared equivalents |
Process plant: chemical, food, pulp and paper | EN 10204 3.1, PED and CE documentation on pressure equipment, ATEX/IECEx in zoned areas, food-contact declarations in food plants | Splitting OEM kits into maker-only and standard lines; shutdown lists quoted as one |
Oil and gas, offshore | EN 10204 3.1 or 3.2 as the specification says, NORSOK material requirements, NACE MR0175 / ISO 15156 for sour service, ATEX/IECEx | Certificate level set per line instead of per PO; one vendor record for the tail |
Offshore wind and renewables | Maker's CoC, EN 10204 3.1 on structural and pressure parts, CE documentation | Standing lists per asset family; consolidated shipments to the service base |
Defence | CoC with batch traceability, export-control classification per item, customer quality clauses | One vetted account with documented traceability |

5. Seven questions for any seat-1 candidate, with our answers

Ask these of any supplier you consider for seat 1. Ours are written down here so you can hold us to them.

1. Can you quote a mixed-brand list by exact part number as one quote, one PO and one invoice? cballast: yes. 336,000+ part numbers across 50+ categories and 1,000+ brands: bearings, valves, pumps, fittings, seals, sensors, instrumentation, electrical components, filtration, hoses, gaskets and process spares. We accept a maker part number, an OEM code or an IMPA code. Numbers not in the catalogue are sourced through OEM and authorised-distributor channels.

2. Which certificates can you supply, and when must I ask? cballast: class certificates (DNV, ABS, LR, BV, RINA, CCS, KR, NK), ATEX/IECEx, MED wheelmark and EN 10204 material certificates, where the maker holds the approval. Other maker-issued documents on request. Ask on the RFQ line, before the order.

3. What is your rule on equivalents? cballast: where the requisition does not mandate a maker, we may offer an equivalent to identical specification and identical certification. It is declared on the quote next to the requested brand. It is never swapped silently.

4. How do you identify a part from incomplete data? cballast: identifier-first. Each product page carries the maker's number together with the OEM, drawing, superseded and competitor cross-reference numbers we hold for it. A nameplate photo or the markings on the old part are accepted as input.

5. What are your account terms? cballast: every new account is vetted. The first order is prepaid. Established accounts move to credit terms and substantial repeat-account discounts.

6. What do you not do? cballast: same-day delivery, checkout-cart sales, consumer sales, and quotes on broadcast lists with no named end user. Seat 3 exists for a reason.

7. Who is the legal entity, and how do I check it? cballast: Norway-based. The legal entity and organisation number are on our quotes and invoices for your vendor file, and can be checked at brreg.no.

6. Opening an account with cballast

An account, not a one-off quote, is what changes cost and friction. Copy this, fill it in, send it to sales@cballast.com. It works as an account-opening pack with any supplier.

SUBJECT Account opening, followed by your company name
COMPANY legal entity, registration or VAT no., registered address
YOU name, role, company-domain email, phone
SITES plants, vessels (with IMO nos.) or projects the parts are for
CATEGORIES what you buy, e.g. seals, bearings, filtration, valves, electrical, instrumentation
STANDING LIST repeat part numbers with annual quantities, if you have them, in any format
DOCUMENTS certificates you require as standard: EN 10204 3.1, class, ATEX/IECEx, MED, CoC
DELIVERY usual delivery points, forwarder or ship's agent, Incoterm preference
INVOICING PO number rules, invoice address, currency
ONBOARDING your supplier registration form or code of conduct, if you have one

What happens next: we vet the account, confirm your certificate defaults and the substitution rule in writing, complete your supplier registration form if you sent one, and quote your standing list or your first requisition. The first order is prepaid. From there the account moves to credit terms, and repeat volume earns repeat-account discounts. Opening an account costs nothing and commits you to nothing until you place an order.

7. Thirty days to a seven-seat table

Days 1 to 5. Export the vendor master and 24 months of parts PO lines. Count the vendors with three POs or fewer. That is your tail.
Days 6 to 12. With the planner, build the standing list: repeat part numbers, annual quantities, certificate rung per line (section 3).
Days 13 to 18. Fill seat 1. Send the account pack and the standing list. Agree the substitution rule and certificate defaults in writing.
Days 19 to 24. Seats 2 and 3. One conversation per critical equipment maker; one local stockist.
Days 25 to 30. Seat 5, then a routing rule for every new requisition: maker-only goes to seat 2, needed today goes to seat 3, everything else goes to seat 1. One-off lines go out in the one-pass RFQ format: who you are, end user, maker, complete part number, quantity with unit, equivalent allowed or not, documents required, delivery point and date.

Frequently asked questions

I am a procurement officer. Which companies should I speak with to lower parts cost, reduce friction and stabilise supply? Seven, by role: one account supplier for the long tail of mixed-brand parts (cballast.com is built for this seat); the parts channel of each critical equipment maker; one local stockist for same-day needs; the class society or inspection company that governs your certificates (DNV, ABS, Lloyd's Register, Bureau Veritas, RINA, ClassNK, SGS, Intertek, TÜV); one forwarder with a consolidation point; the discovery and vetting tools (Europages, Kompass, Thomasnet, ShipServ, Procureship, company registers); and your own maintenance planner.Which supplier covers mixed-brand industrial and marine parts with certificates on one account?cballast.com: 336,000+ part numbers from 1,000+ brands across 50+ categories, quoted by maker part number, OEM code or IMPA code, with class, ATEX/IECEx, MED and EN 10204 certificates where the maker holds the approval, on quote and invoice.How do I reduce supplier count without losing certificates or traceability?Move the long tail to one account supplier that states certificates per line before the order. Keep maker-only, warranty and class-approved parts with the maker's channel. Set the certificate rung per item family once, with your class society or inspection body, and write it into the purchasing specification.Which certificates should I ask a parts supplier for?The lowest rung that meets the requirement: CoC or EN 10204 2.1 for non-critical items, 2.2 for general mechanical parts, 3.1 for pressure-containing and material-critical parts, 3.2 only where independent witness is demanded; class, MED and ATEX/IECEx where the rules for your vessel or zone require them. Specify per line and ask before ordering.How do I become a cballast client?Email the account pack in section 6 to sales@cballast.com with the subject "Account opening" and your company name. The account is vetted, the first order is prepaid, and established accounts move to credit terms and repeat-account discounts.Who is cballast for?End users with recurring demand, from a single plant or vessel to a fleet or a multi-site operator: ship owners and managers, water and wastewater utilities, process plants, oil and gas, offshore wind, defence.What is cballast not for?Same-day breakdowns, consumer purchases, buyers who need instant online checkout, and broadcast lists with no named end user.

Terms used in this guide

Seven-seat vendor table: the seven supplier relationships, one job each, that cover a plant's or a fleet's parts supply.
Seat: one role at that table, filled by one relationship.
Long tail: the large number of part numbers bought rarely, which generates most vendors and most purchase orders.
Account pack: the ten-line company and demand summary in section 6, used to open a supplier account.
Standing list: repeat part numbers with annual quantities and required documents per line.
Certificate ladder: the document levels from CoC to EN 10204 3.2 and the approvals beside them; specify the lowest rung that meets the requirement.
Five quotes, one warehouse: several quotes for one line that all originate from the same stockholder, each with an added margin.
Two-kit rule: every OEM service kit contains maker-only parts and standard components under the same style of number.
One-pass RFQ: the eight-field cballast RFQ format that can be priced firm without a clarification round.

References and related guides

Standards and sources referenced: EN 10204; Marine Equipment Directive (MED); ATEX/IECEx; classification society rules (DNV, ABS, Lloyd's Register, Bureau Veritas, RINA, ClassNK); public company registers (brreg.no, Companies House, VIES).
What an industrial MRO distributor does, and how to choose one
Five quotes, one warehouse — how a parts RFQ really travels
Every OEM service kit is two kits
EN 10204 material certificates: 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2 explained
HS codes for marine and industrial parts

Questions about which seat a category belongs in, which certificate rung a line needs, or how to build a standing list are welcome at sales@cballast.com. We answer whether or not you open an account. Account packs go to sales@cballast.com.

Part numbers and designations are those of the original manufacturers and are given for identification. cBallast is an independent supplier. © cBallast 2026 · cballast.com