Wholesaler interview questions

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What to expect

Wholesaler interviews focus on your commercial judgement, your ability to manage stock and supplier relationships, and how you use systems to keep goods flowing. Expect a mix of process questions, behavioural questions and scenario questions that test your decision making under pressure.

- **Process:** How you plan purchases, manage inventory and coordinate logistics.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of negotiation, problem solving and relationship management.
- **Scenario:** What you would do if a supplier raises prices, a shipment is delayed or demand spikes.
- **Technical:** Your familiarity with ERP and inventory software such as SAP Business One, Oracle NetSuite or Fishbowl Inventory.
- **Commercial:** How you analyse margins, demand trends and supplier performance.

Typically a phone screen with a recruiter or hiring manager, followed by one or two in person or video interviews. You may be asked to review a stock report or work through a negotiation scenario. Some employers include a site visit to the warehouse or a meet and greet with the team.

1. Walk me through how you decide how much stock to order from a supplier.

Why they ask

This tests your understanding of demand forecasting, lead times and cash flow.

How to structure your answer

A step by step walk through: start with historical sales and current stock, factor in lead time and supplier minimums, check storage capacity and cash flow, then place the order and review after delivery.

Example answer

“I start by looking at sales history for the last few months and current stock on hand. I check the supplier lead time and any minimum order quantity. Then I consider how much storage space we have and whether tying up cash in that stock makes sense. If demand is steady, I order enough to cover lead time plus a safety margin. If there is a promotion coming, I adjust up. After the order arrives, I review how quickly it sells and adjust the next order.”

2. Tell me about a time you negotiated a better deal with a supplier.

Why they ask

Negotiation is core to wholesale. They want to see you can improve terms without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep it concise and focus on the outcome.

Example answer

“We were buying packaging from one supplier and I noticed our volumes had grown but our pricing had not changed. I arranged a meeting and presented our purchase history. I asked for a volume discount or better payment terms. They offered a small discount but I pushed for a shorter lead time instead, which was more valuable to us. We agreed on a two day faster delivery at the same price, which helped us reduce our own safety stock.”

3. A key supplier tells you they need to increase prices by a significant margin. What do you do?

Why they ask
This is a common pressure point. They want to see you stay calm, assess the impact and explore options.

How to structure your answer
A judgement under pressure structure: acknowledge, gather facts, explore alternatives, negotiate, communicate.

Example answer

"First I would ask for the reason and the details. Is it a permanent increase or temporary? Then I would calculate the impact on our margins and check if we can absorb it or need to pass it on. I would look at alternative suppliers or ask if a larger order could lock in the old price. If we have to accept it, I would negotiate a phased increase and give our retail customers as much notice as possible so they can adjust."

4. How do you use software to track inventory and make purchasing decisions?

Why they ask
Wholesalers rely on systems. They want to know you are not just guessing.

How to structure your answer
A technical walk through: name the systems you have used, describe the reports you run and the KPIs you watch.

Example answer

"I have used SAP Business One and Fishbowl Inventory. I run a stock ageing report every week to see what is moving slowly. I also look at reorder point alerts for fast moving lines. For purchasing, I export sales data and build a simple forecast in Excel. I check supplier performance reports to see who is delivering on time. That combination helps me decide what to buy and what to clear."

5. Describe a time you had to manage a stock shortage or oversupply.

Why they ask
This tests your problem solving and how you communicate with customers and suppliers.

How to structure your answer
Use STAR but emphasise the actions you took and what you learned.

Example answer

"We had a shipping delay that left us short on a popular product for two weeks. I immediately checked which customers were affected and called the largest ones first to explain the delay. I offered a substitute product where possible and rearranged deliveries to prioritise those who needed it most. I also worked with the supplier to air freight a small urgent batch. The result was that we kept our key accounts happy and they appreciated the honesty."

6. How do you build and maintain relationships with retailers and suppliers?

Why they ask
Wholesale is a relationship business. They want to see you are reliable and easy to deal with.

How to structure your answer
A client facing structure: describe your communication style, how you handle problems and how you add value.

Example answer

"I treat both sides fairly. With suppliers, I pay on time, give clear forecasts and don't mess them around on orders. With retailers, I keep them informed about stock levels, delivery times and any issues before they have to ask. If there is a problem, I pick up the phone. I also check in regularly to

see what is selling and what they need next. That way they trust me and keep coming back."