Supplier Vetting Checklist

Companion to The China Sourcing Playbook

Run every item before wiring a deposit. Estimates and prices referenced in the book are as of mid-2026, verify current figures when you use this.

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1. Identity, Is the Company Real

- [ ] Obtain a copy of the business license (ask directly, legitimate suppliers expect this)
- [ ] Check the 18-character Unified Social Credit Code on GSXT (gsxt.gov.cn): the code must return exactly the same registered Chinese company name as the license
- [ ] Registered company name matches the name on the Alibaba or platform storefront
- [ ] Registered business scope includes manufacturing (not only trading), if they claim to be a factory
- [ ] Registered address is consistent with where they say the factory is
- [ ] Company age and registered capital are consistent with their claims

2. Platform Signals, What the Badges Really Mean

- [ ] Verified Supplier badge (third-party on-site audit) vs Gold Supplier (paid membership, no audit): know which one you are looking at
- [ ] Read the full audit report if the platform shows one (Made-in-China publishes them free)
- [ ] Check the supplier's Trade Assurance limit and how much of your order it would actually cover
- [ ] Review transaction history, response rate, and years on the platform

3. Capability, Can They Make Your Product

- [ ] They have made this product category before (ask for photos of past production, not catalog renders)
- [ ] Machinery and processes match what your product needs
- [ ] MOQ, lead time, and capacity answers are consistent across conversations
- [ ] They answer technical questions about materials and tolerances specifically, not generically
- [ ] Export experience to the US, and familiarity with your labeling requirements

4. Factory or Trading Company

- [ ] Business scope on the license says manufacturing
- [ ] Video call from the factory floor showing your product category in production
- [ ] They can explain their own production steps in detail
- [ ] If it is a trading company: decide consciously whether that is acceptable for this order (small mixed orders, hard-to-reach factories), and price the margin in

5. Audit, For Orders That Justify It

- [ ] Third-party factory audit booked (day rates in the book, Chapter 7)
- [ ] Audit scope agreed: legal identity, facility, production capacity, quality system
- [ ] Audit report reviewed: non-conformities acceptable or fixed

6. Money, Protect the Wire

- [ ] Beneficiary bank account name exactly matches the registered company name on the business license
- [ ] No personal accounts, no affiliate company accounts, no exceptions
- [ ] Bank details written into the purchase order or contract
- [ ] Agreed protocol: any change of bank details is verified by phone on a number obtained independently, never from the email announcing the change
- [ ] Payment terms agreed in writing (deposit and balance, and what triggers the balance)
- [ ] First orders: pay on platform (Trade Assurance) or keep the exposure small

Red Flags, Walk Away or Slow Down

- Price far below every other quote for the same spec
- Pressure to move the conversation and payment off platform
- Bank account in a different name, or a request to pay a finance company
- Sudden change of bank details near the balance payment
- Vague or contradictory answers about who actually manufactures
- No business license for confidentiality reasons

One page, printed, on your desk. The half hour this list costs is the cheapest insurance in this business.