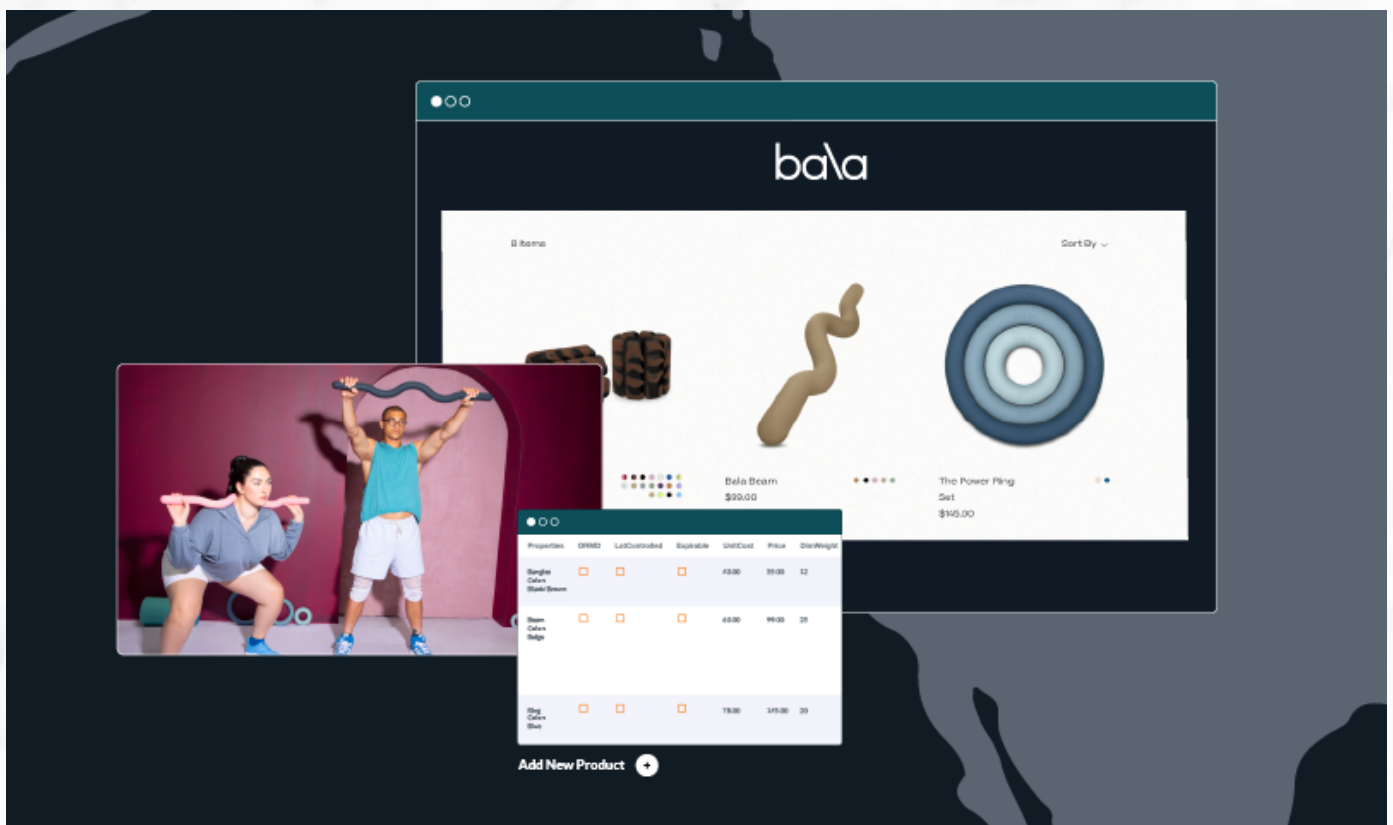


MASONHUB + ba\la

# How MasonHub Helped Scale Fashion's Go-To Fitness Brand

After a year of explosive growth, Bala cofounder and CEO Natalie Holloway focused on finding the right fulfillment partner



"There's a million ways to start a business, but I feel like there's two general directions. There's the one in which you raise a ton of money, you start with a team of 10 or 20 people. You sourced a branding agency, you hired a packaging design company, and you have your ads ready to go. Everything's perfect. And then there's the opposite, where you have a product or an idea and you're just figuring it out along the way without a lot of money. We were that one," says Bala cofounder and CEO Natalie Holloway.

Alongside her husband Max Kislevitz, Holloway invented Bala Bangles, adjustable wrist and ankle weights that come in an array of fashionable colors. Today, the line includes bars and power rings, sliders and resistance bands. Kislevitz designs every product and heads up creative, while Holloway handles operations and heads up marketing. "Operations is something I wish I knew when I launched the business. I didn't have an operations background. I just ended up on that side of the business," says Holloway, who previously worked in advertising for a decade. "We knew absolutely nothing. I didn't even know what a freight forwarder was or anything about factories and now I'm the main factory point of contact."

During Bala's three-year journey from idea to fullblown "As Seen on TV" brand, Holloway not only learned operations, she optimized them by partnering with fulfillment technology and services provider MasonHub.

**"Your back-of-house is just as important as your front-of-house or your Instagram. More important, honestly."**

- Natalie Holloway, Cofounder & CEO, Bala

"Our goal is for our clients to love fulfillment instead of dreading it," says MasonHub founder and CEO Donny Salazar. "Once we take away the burden of receiving, packing and shipping, and give them full visibility of their inventory with a host of cloud-based data platforms, they can start to optimize their business instead of struggling to keep up with growth."

## National Exposure + a Pandemic = Explosive Growth

The road to success had some bumps. Like most startups, Bala fulfilled orders in-house during its first two years. “We should have gotten a fulfillment provider before we aired on ‘Shark Tank’ but we knew there was a transition period with a warehouse where they learn your products, and we didn’t want anything to get messed up.”

We were also in a lockdown and suddenly everyone needed fitness equipment at home,” recounts Holloway. “So, a lot of things led to our growth, but last year there were some undeniably big things. We grew 10X and we were not set up for that operationally. It has been so helpful to have MasonHub and grow together on that end.”

**“I liked that MasonHub treated fulfillment differently, with a more modern approach. That was very compelling for our brand, because we’re trying to be modern and fresh with the times.”**

– Natalie Holloway, Cofounder & CEO, Bala

## From In-House Fulfillment to Finding the Right Partner

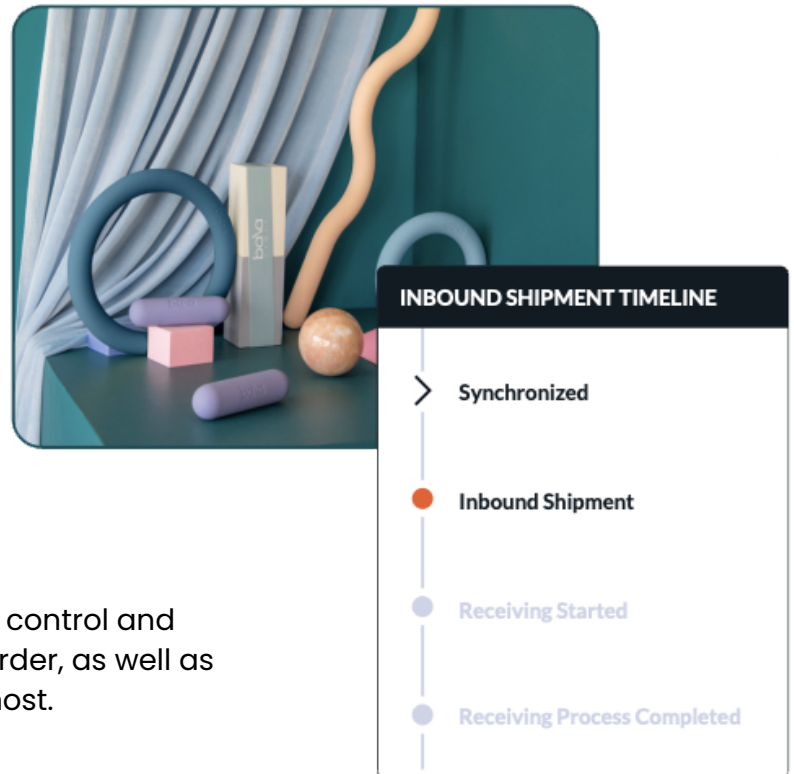
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# Real-Time Inventory Visibility: Knowledge is Power

Taking advantage of MasonHub's one-click integration with Shopify gave Bala quick and easy access to all their inventory data within MasonHub's intuitive user portal.

"I can see how many units I have and when they get checked in. When somebody buys something, it's removed in real-time. That's very, very helpful because I can always jump into the dashboard and know how many colors I have in every SKU," said Holloway.

The 24/7 dashboard equipped Bala with control and confidence in how much product to re-order, as well as data on which colors and SKUs sell the most.



## Compliance Matters When It Comes to Omnichannel

One of the trickiest parts of being an omnichannel retailer – selling direct-to-consumer via Shopify, on Amazon, as well as in large retail chains and smaller boutiques – is dealing with wholesale operations. "We're in Free People, Bloomingdale's, Dick's Sporting Goods, American Eagle and others. A lot of the big department stores use EDI (electronic data interchange) so there can be a learning curve," says Holloway.

A fulfillment house like MasonHub knows the ins and outs of each store and vendor's requirements, removing that headache for the brand.

"A lot of brands don't realize what it takes to go into wholesale. All of the vendors have different compliance standards and requirements. You have to be very thorough in how you process those orders, and for a small brand it can be overwhelming," says Salazar.

**"Once we take away the burden of receiving, packing and shipping, and give clients full visibility of their inventory, they can optimize their businesses instead of struggling to keep up with growth."**

- Donny Salazar, Founder & CEO, MasonHub

"Not only do you have to provide updates to the EDI files and go onto their vendor portals, you also have to provide information about the shipments, so you need systems in place to deal with deliveries. If you fail to do any of these things, the vendor charges you back, which can be very costly."

While outsourcing fulfillment comes with its own set of costs, it can be worth it, especially if a brand doesn't have the infrastructure or the experience to deal with wholesale operations.

# Fast, Low-Cost Shipping Enhances Customer Experience

“The customer experience is so important. People will shop again if they get the item within two days,” says Holloway. Partners with strategically located warehouses and fulfillment centers are in a better position to offer two-day shipping to 90% the country, and having inventory in more than one location gives a retailer options when shipping carriers experience shipping delays.

“We built order-routing logic into our platform to optimize on both speed and cost when it comes to shipping,” said Salazar. “With bicoastal facilities, and an eventual nationwide network of fully-owned and operated fulfillment centers, we can keep up with our clients’ growth and their customers’ expectations for fast, low-cost shipping.”

Expanding on the benefits of fast shipping are companies such as Returnly, which make returns, exchanges and refunds quick and seamless. Such specialty platforms can integrate with both Shopify and MasonHub, making things even easier for the client.



## FULFILLMENT OPTIONS

- Fulfillment option 1:**  
Estimated cost: \$20.34
- Fulfillment option 2:**  
Estimated cost: \$18.94
- Fulfillment option 3:**  
Estimated cost: \$21.02



# Inventory Planning Challenges Even Successful Brands

Hands down, Holloway says the biggest challenge of being a fast-growing company is inventory planning. “Luckily our product doesn’t expire, so we can keep as much as we want, but planning for not having too much and not having too little has been a challenge for us,” she notes.

To help with demand planning, MasonHub enables customers to track how many weeks of supply they have available based on selling data from the previous period.

To be sure, demand planning is a specific skill, and planners are among the employees Bala has added to its team as they’ve grown.

Concludes Holloway, “I can’t stress enough how important operations is, because as our business grew 10X, our fulfillment partner had to keep up, and they did a great job.”

