

How to Stock & Manage Colour Inventory

When you're starting out

Built from real salon usage data, not guesswork

The problem with stocking colour based on instinct

Most stylists starting out either over buy (stocking a full range because it feels professional) or under buy (picking 20 shades and hoping for the best)
Both approaches cost money.

~20%

of shades in a range account for 80% of total usage

50%+

of products in a typical range go unused in any given quarter

4 wks

is a good starting buffer for most ordering cycles

The real answer comes from understanding which shades actually get used, and using data that consistently shows the same pattern:

A small number of shades do the majority of the work, and the rest sit on the shelf.

Start With Activators. Always.

If you only take one thing from this guide, make it this: your activators are your highest risk inventory item. Running out of developer mid service is a genuine crisis. Running out of a shade is an inconvenience.

Activator usage across three salons:

Activator	Quarterly usage	Min on hand	Risk of running out
20 Vol (standard)	6,540g.	2,000g at reorder	High
30 Vol (lift)	5,660g.	1,800g at reorder	High
3.5-10 Vol (toning)	1,000-3,000g.	400-1,000g	Medium
40 Vol (high lift)	30-300g.	1 bottle minimum	Low

Once you have your activators sorted, everything else can be categorised into four simple tiers based on usage frequency.

The Four Tiers of Colour Inventory

Tier	Quarterly usage	Min to keep	Max to hold	Order freq
Trace	< 10g	10g (floor)	1 tube	On demand
Low	10-25g	10-25g	1-2 tubes	When at min
Medium	25-100g	1 tube	3 tubes	When at min
High	> 100g	2 tubes	4-5 tubes	Every order

Scale thresholds proportionally to tube size

What actually gets used? Real data from real salons

✓ Stock from day one

- Natural/Neutral mid-range (5.0, 6.0, 7.0)
- Natural neutral doubles (6.00 NN, 7.00 NN)
- Your go-to brunette level (depends on clientele)
- Ash and Violet shades for toning and refining
- Clear / diluent
- Your lightener of choice
- 20 Vol and 30 Vol developer (bulk)
- Toning developer (3.5–10 Vol)

🕒 Add once you have usage data

- Fashion shades (RR, VV, CC etc.)
- High-lift range (unless you do a lot)
- Full booster/additive range
- Toner range beyond 2–3 core toners
- Specialty formats (fluids, glosses) before testing
- Entire level ranges (e.g. all 9.x shades)
- Duplicate shades across two similar brands

Which shades are consistently low or zero usage?

- Level 1–2 shades
- Level 3 (very dark)
- Extreme fashion colours
- High-lift range (if not on menu)
- Specialty additive range
- Duplicate NN variants
- 40 Vol developer
- Pastel booster range

This doesn't mean you'll never use them, it means you should wait until a client books those services before stocking them. Order on demand until you have evidence of regular demand.

The Par Level Formula

A par level is simply: the minimum quantity you should have on the shelf before placing an order, and the maximum you should ever hold.

Minimum (reorder trigger)

Monthly usage rate =
Quarterly usage \div 3

Set minimum = 1 month's worth
(4-week buffer)

Maximum (shelf ceiling)

High-use items:
3 to 4 x monthly rate

Everything else:
1-2 units maximum

Why gram-based minimums beat tube-based

Most stylists think in whole tubes – "I need 2 tubes of 6.0."

But setting your minimum in grams is smarter, because it accounts for the partial tube already open on your shelf.

If your minimum is 1 tube (100g) and you have 80g left in an open tube, the system won't trigger a reorder. But if your minimum is 50g (gram-based), it only triggers when you're actually running low.

The 10g floor rule

For any shade that gets used – even rarely – set your minimum to at least 10g. This ensures the system always catches a reorder before you hit zero. Never set a used shade to 0g minimum.

How to set your first par levels without any data

If you're starting from scratch with no usage history, here's a practical starting point based on what we've seen across real salons.

1 Map your service menu first

Before buying anything, write down every colour service you plan to offer. Each service maps to specific products. A balayage client needs lightener and toner. A regrowth touch up needs a specific shade and developer. Start from the service, not the shelf.

2 Buy your activators in bulk from day one

Developer/activator should never be something you're rationing. Buy at least 3–4 bottles of your primary volumes (20 Vol and 30 Vol especially). You will use them faster than you expect.

3 Stock 2+ tubes of your top 10-15 shades

Based on your service menu, identify your most likely high-use shades. Buy 2 tubes of each to start. This gives you a working buffer without over committing cash to stock.

4 Stock 1 tube of your next 10 shades

These are shades you expect to use regularly, specific tones, secondary neutrals, fashion shades you plan to offer. One tube each, reorder when needed.

5 Order everything else on demand for the first 3 months

Don't stock what you haven't used. If a client books a service that requires something you don't have, order it for that appointment. After 3 months you'll have real data to set proper par levels.

6 Run your first usage report after 90 days

After one quarter, pull a usage report sorted by grams used (highest to lowest). This becomes your bible. Anything in the top 20% gets a 2 tube minimum. Anything with zero usage gets reviewed, keep it only if it's genuinely on your menu.

What the data says about lighteners

Lightener is often the highest single-product usage item in a modern salon – higher than any individual shade.

Salon type	Annual usage	Min on hand
High-volume blonding	2,858g+ per quarter	8 packets (4,000g)
Mixed services salon	500–2,000g per quarter	3–6 packets
Primarily brunette/toning	Under 500g per quarter	1–2 packets

The Trap of Stocking a "Full Range"

109

products in one salon's
Oway HColor range

63

products had actual
usage in the year

46

products sat unused
for 12 months

How ranges actually get used:

- Top 5 shades = ~40% of all usage
- Top 15 shades = ~70% of all usage
- Bottom 30% of range = under 5% of usage
- Zero-use products = 30–55% of range

Managing a Second or Specialty Range

Primary range

- Stock 2 tubes of high-use shades
- Gram based minimums on everything
- Review quarterly
- Activators always in bulk
- Track every gram used per service

Specialty / toning range

- 1 tube maximum on most shades
- 10g minimum floor on used shades
- 0g on shades not in your menu
- Review annually (usage is slow)
- Order on demand for rare shades

Summary: The Rules That Hold Across Every Range

- Activators first, always. Buy more than you think you need.
 - Stock to your menu, not the brand's full range.
 - Set gram based minimums, not tube based.
 - Use the 4-week buffer rule for ordering.
 - Zero usage products get 0g minimum.
- Review every quarter – usage patterns shift.

[Start tracking with Color Bar Manager](#)

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