Building a Small Office Network

Building a small office network means starting with a foundation of switches and routers. The following guide will help you understand the difference between switches and routers and develop a clear vision for what your network foundation needs.

Building a Small Office Network: The Difference Between Switches and Routers

When building a small office network, the two most essential pieces of equipment you will need are switches and routers. Though they look similar, the two devices perform different functions in a network.

- Switches connect multiple devices (computers, printers, servers) on the same network within a building or campus. A switch enables connected devices to share information and talk to each other. Building a small office network isn't possible without switches to tie devices together.
- Routers tie multiple networks together. When building a small office network, you'll need one or more routers. A router connects your networked computers to the Internet. This enables all connected computers to share one single Internet connection. A router acts as a dispatcher, choosing the best route for your information to travel. It connects your business to the world, protects information from security threats, and can even decide which computers get priority over others.

Building a Small Office Network: Determining the Best Foundation

When building a small office network, it's important to determine the best foundation for your company's needs. The following tips should help you get started.

- Invest in business-grade switches and routers for reliable communications. Consumer or home networking products can't keep pace with the challenges of business growth.
- Invest in a network that can grow over time, so you can add features and functionality as needed. Additions to consider include video surveillance, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), integrated messaging, and wireless applications.
- Make sure your switches and routers are easy to install, use, and manage. Example: Switches with in-line power allow you to place equipment, such as wireless access points, anywhere there's a network wall jack. You'll be spared the trouble and expense of installing additional electrical outlets or wires to power the devices.

- Make sure your network is designed with reliability and redundancy in mind. This provides the business continuity you'll need to bounce back quickly from unforeseen circumstances.

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