The Essential Guide to
Setting Up a New Office

Questions you need to ask

Setting up a new office can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences for small businesses. Whether you are just starting out or expanding due to growth, or changing locations for whatever reason, at some point every small business will go through the setup experience.

For most small businesses, opening an office is no small undertaking. And you have to take into consideration all the factors and expenses involved, to ensure not only the success of your new office, but your business as a whole.

Here are some important questions to ask yourself before opening a new office:

What IT staff will we have available to manage the technology in the new office?

To maximize workplace productivity, simple secure connectivity is a must. You need to be able to quickly set up your office to accommodate your employees and customers. Whether you do it yourself or work with a partner, look for an office network that is simple, secure, fast, and easy to manage. It's important to consider solutions that will do the heavy lifting for you and have easily managed components with security built inside, such as dashboards that can remotely monitor system performance in real time.
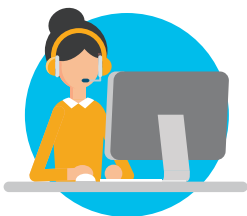
How much technical support will we need?

Most small businesses have dynamic 24x7 requirements as employees are constantly moving on and off the network from different locations, switching between devices and applications. All the technology needs to work to keep the business running. Any time lost to redesign, integration, or rewiring and cabling is a loss of productive time for employees and revenue for the business. The possibility of a network failure and resulting business disruption is a risk you can't afford to take. Look for solutions that have technical support and training.

What capabilities are most important for our business?

This can be challenging if you have any legal or security requirements to meet. For example, if you are expanding a current retail store, do you need more advanced security features like security camera analytics to track foot traffic or store inventory and assets? Maybe your current network is not robust enough. The good news is that solutions are available today that are simple to manage and still have lots of advanced networking and security capabilities at an affordable price. Don't go too basic here; you don't have to settle.

How do we want to manage our operations?

There are various office out-of-a-box options, each with their pros and cons. It really depends on how you want to run your business. Are you a digital business that exists solely in the cloud? Then a cloud networking solution would probably be best for your business. Especially if you are comfortable with a subscription-based payment plan. If you're not sure and just want the very basics to get started, then a box solution with a one-time charge may be better. Just be sure to choose products that are smart and offer embedded security and analytics capabilities. Partners can help you set up your office, manage it while training your team, or take it on as a completely managed service for which you pay a predictable monthly amount.

Have you considered your best fit for today and for the growth that is coming?

It's important to think about what you need today. It is equally important to think about what you may require in the future as your business grows. Work with a partner who can help you find just the right balance. You don't want to buy too much, or not enough. A trusted partner can help you sort through the best options for your business and come up with the best solution for your particular circumstances and priorities. It will be one less thing for you to worry about.

We know the various options and approaches available for a new office can seem complicated and confusing. You want simple, clear information in easy-to-understand language to help you make better, informed decisions. Well now you have it. In this guide, we share our tried and true principles and approaches for an ideal office setup.

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Key considerations for choosing an office network

First, we'll describe in a bit more detail the networking equipment required for your office setup. Then we'll cover where you can have that equipment reside: in your office or in the cloud. Finally, we'll provide some tips for your success as well as answer some key questions.

Let's start with the building blocks

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What is a switch?

Switches facilitate the sharing of resources by connecting together all devices in a small business network, including computers, printers, servers, and more. Thanks to the switch, these connected devices can share information and talk to each other, regardless of where they are in a building or on a campus. Building a small business network is not possible without switches to tie devices together.

What is a router?

Just as a switch connects multiple devices to create a network, a router connects multiple switches, and their respective networks, to form an even larger network. These networks may be in a single location or across multiple locations. When building a small business network, you will need one or more routers. In addition to connecting multiple networks together, the router also allows networked devices and multiple users to access the Internet.

Ultimately, a router works as a dispatcher, directing traffic and choosing the most efficient route for information, in the form of data packets, to travel across a network. A router connects your business to the world, protects information from security threats, and even decides which devices have priority over others.
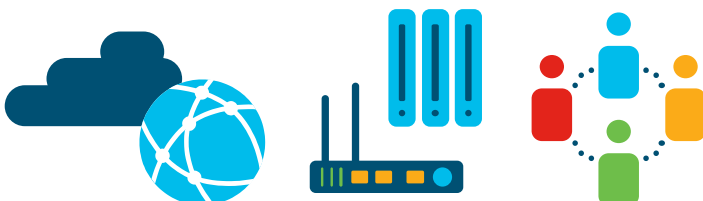
Tips for Network Success

✔ **Consider business-grade switches and routers.** Consumer or home-networking products will not deliver the reliable communications your small business needs and will not keep pace as your business grows.

✔ **Invest in a network designed to grow over time.** With a network that scales as your business grows, you can add new features and functionality, such as video surveillance, integrated messaging, wireless applications, and voice over IP (VoIP), as you need them.

✔ **Technology should help you work more efficiently,** not take time away from other projects that are critical to your business. Look for switches and routers that are easy to install, use, and manage. For example, choosing switches with inline power will allow you to place equipment, like wireless access points, anywhere there is a network wall jack. You will not have to worry about installing additional electrical outlets or wires to power devices.

✔ **Design your network with reliability and redundancy in mind.** This can give you the business continuity you need to recover quickly from unplanned events.

Determine the best place to locate your networking

You have two setup options for your network in today's world: onsite or in the cloud.

Some of it will come down to simply your comfort level, your technical capabilities, and your willingness to do it yourself or not. We know that the number of companies moving to the cloud is steadily increasing, but there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Let's take into consideration the pros and cons of each to help you identify the best option for your business.

An **on-premises** setup comes with a one-time cost. That said, you are dipping into your company's capital to purchase the equipment up front. You will also need IT expertise or internal staff to set up and manage it on a continuing basis. Many business owners tell us that they have received years of reliable service from on-premises routers, switches, and access points. They prefer to keep everything under direct control onsite. Perhaps this is your preference. Just keep in mind this can be more costly upfront and often requires more manual management.

Cloud networking is subscription-based, which means it can grow as your businesses grows. And advanced features, security updates, and fixes can be managed through your subscription. If you're more budget-conscious and want less of a hands-on approach, then housing your network in the cloud might be better for your small business.

Cloud or onsite: top 5 key questions and answers

1 Are there small office network must-haves? Yes! You want products from a trusted brand ideally, so they are integrated and all work together and provide the reliability and security your business needs. This is where Cisco can help. We have a specially designed portfolio of these products just for small businesses like yours. Also, you want to keep your data and transactions secure from risk, without sacrificing flexibility. Finally, if you host customers at your location, then think about Wi-Fi connectivity—customers and employees expect it to be stellar.

2 Aren't these networking products all the same? This is an area where you get what you pay for in terms of quality and reliability. You can find cheaper versions at big box stores or on Amazon, but they are not the same. Some products do not offer security, or encryption needed for transactions, and lack the ability to scale as your company grows. Or they may not be able to handle changing volumes of traffic. And this is a big one for small businesses, you may not get any product or technical support.

3 How do I manage my costs? We think it makes sense to work with a partner, one certified and trained to help you evaluate the right solution. You don't want to pay for something you won't use. And, you may prefer more of a pay-for-use structure versus a large capital investment. A partner can help you make this decision and more often than not, they are a small business in your community.

4 I thought cloud was just for big businesses. Not true—cloud has brought huge networking benefits to businesses of all sizes, and in fact, small businesses may benefit the most. You can have the same setup on a small-scale version compared to big companies for an affordable price. In general, cloud has brought technology costs down and made networking much easier to manage.

5 How do I decide between cloud or on-premises networking? If you are comfortable managing your IT without help, the cloud might be the best fit for you. But, if you want everything onsite and want to pay for it all at once versus through a monthly subscription, then on-premises networking is probably your best fit. However, there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution and much depends on your business needs. We recommend working with a Cisco partner to determine the best solution for your needs today and your needs in the future.

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Manage your business, not your network

Small businesses need to move quickly to become and stay relevant. But IT is complex. Most small business teams are focused on meeting their own customer needs, developing new products and services, managing the supply chain, or making payroll. There isn't time to think about all the moving parts in IT or changing technical requirements.

This is where Cisco and our partners can help. Small businesses can look to Cisco for a portfolio of technology solutions that are specifically designed to meet the needs of the unique small-business environment. And they can count on the expertise of talented Cisco® partners to help them purchase and deploy a solution that is right for them.

Why Cisco?

For more than 35 years, Cisco has served some of the world's largest, most complex organizations. Now, that same technology that supports these industry leaders is affordable and easier to buy, set up, and use in small businesses. At Cisco, we're with you every step of the way, keeping you strong, smart, and safe so you can focus on keeping your business humming. Wherever you take your life's work, and wherever it takes you, we're here to make sure technology works as hard as you do.

What is digital transformation for small business, and why should I care?

The term digital transformation has been used so widely and for so long, you might have written it off as just another corporate buzzword or a phrase that doesn't apply to small businesses.

But once you get past the hype and jargon, digital transformation simply means digitizing processes. When an entrepreneur moves from using a shoebox or bank box to store handwritten receipts to entering sales into a cloud-based accounting system or a grocery store digitizes its inventory process, the business undergoes digital transformation.

Small businesses come in many sizes and shapes. You might be a manufacturing company with 150 employees that assembles circuit boards, but rarely needs its staff to touch a traditional computer, tablet, or mobile device. Or you may have 10 employees who manage a complex cloud-based infrastructure. Or you might be a remote-first company that depends heavily on collaboration technologies and mobile applications so employees across the globe can work together easily.

Whether you're looking to automate existing processes, or you want to embrace digital technology for a new initiative, you should keep a few important concepts in mind.

> " With Cisco, the solutions simply work well together. From access points to switches to firewalls, all of them work together. Having it all in the same dashboard makes it work together. It makes it easy for the techs. It then also translates into a great customer experience for our clients and that's why we do it.
>
> **– Chaz Barker,** *Procurement Coordinator,Sea to Sky Networks*

Digital transformation won't fix a broken process No matter what your situation may be, the same rule applies: automating a bad process doesn't magically turn it into a good process. You need to look at your business operations holistically. Sometimes digital transformation can involve making difficult choices, embracing a new business model, or even completely rethinking how you do business.

Digital transformation doesn't happen in a vacuum
Changing your operations affects the people connected to your organization. Depending on what you're doing, you may need your employees, your customers, your vendors, or all of them to get on board with the new ideas and processes. Change is hard, and odds are good that some people won't like it, particularly at first. Be prepared to experiment and pivot when you run into budgetary, personnel, or other hurdles.

Digital transformation can be big for small businesses
When it comes to digital transformation—a fancy word for using technology to modernize the way you operate—small businesses often have a huge advantage: you aren't bogged down by old legacy infrastructure and operations. The smart use of new technology can help small businesses remain competitive, but first you need to stop and consider what's possible.

Examine your business operations. How could you take advantage of new technology in various areas of your business? A good first step is to start with your customers. What do they need? How could you make it faster or easier for them to work with you? Could new tools and technology help?

For small business, digital transformation is more than just a buzzword. It offers new ways for you to serve your customers and work smarter, faster, and better.

To get started with your Cisco New Office Solution, please contact us today.