smartlife
An IT Solutions Company

UniFi vs. Store-Bought Routers

Why a business outgrows the router from the electronics aisle

A router from Best Buy or Amazon is built for a household: a few people, a few dozen devices, one network, and an app that hides the details. Plenty of small businesses start on one, and it works until the business adds cameras, a card reader, guest Wi-Fi or a second room. UniFi, made by Ubiquiti, is built for the next step, and it is what we install for most of our customers.

This guide compares the two for a business owner deciding whether the store-bought router is still enough.

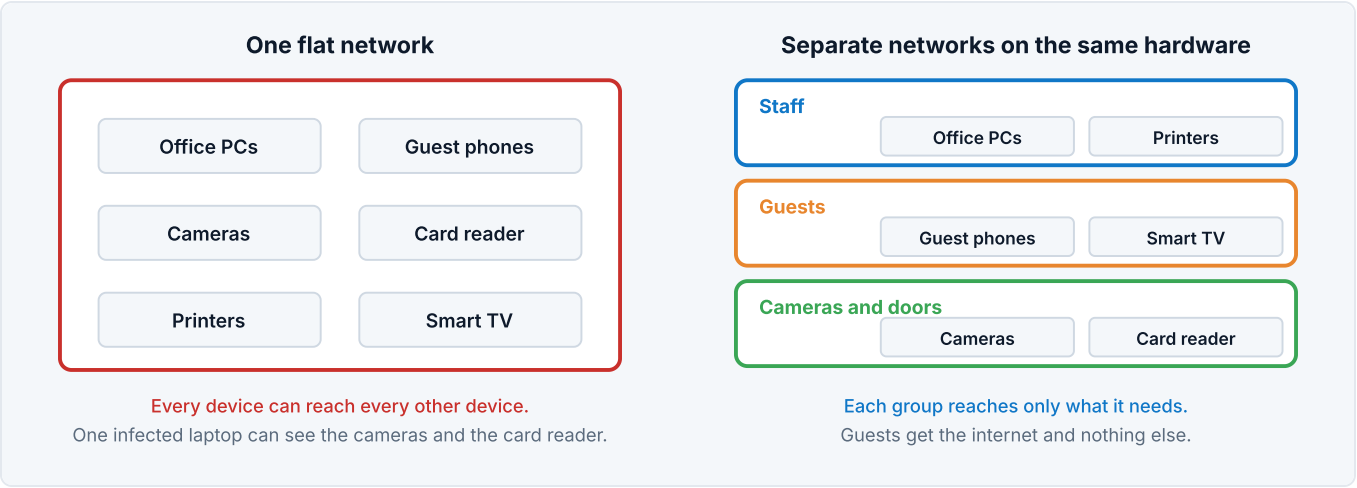
THE SHORT VERSION

- Consumer routers and mesh kits (Netgear, TP-Link, Eero, Google Nest Wifi) are good home products. They are designed around one network for one household.
- A business needs staff, guests, cameras and payment devices kept apart. That separation is the main thing consumer gear leaves out.
- UniFi uses cabled access points, a real firewall, and one dashboard for every device and every site, with no license to keep it running.
- UniFi costs more than a mesh kit at the start and needs cabling and setup. It is built to stay in place for years.

What store-bought gear is built for

The mesh kits on the shelf solve a home problem well: cover a house without running cable, and set it up from a phone in ten minutes. The units talk to each other over the air, the app shows a list of devices, and there is usually one main network plus a guest network.

None of that is wrong. It is a different job from running a building where a camera system, a door controller, a phone system, a point-of-sale terminal and forty laptops share the same wiring.



The same building wired two ways. Separate networks are the main thing consumer gear leaves out.

Where it falls short in a business

One network for everything

Office computers, guest phones, cameras and the card reader all sit together. A problem on one device can reach the rest.

Coverage by relay, not by cable

Mesh units pass traffic to each other over the air, so they share airtime with your devices. Speed drops with each hop and with each wall.

No real view of the network

A phone app shows a device list. It does not show which switch port a camera is on, or why it dropped at 2:00 PM.

Business features cost extra, or are missing

Eero sells a separate business subscription sized for up to 100 connected devices. Other kits simply do not offer the features.

No power over the cable

A consumer unit sits on a shelf near an outlet. It cannot power a ceiling access point, a camera or a desk phone.

Short product life

Consumer models are replaced often, and security updates for older ones end. A business should not have to find that out the hard way.

What UniFi does differently

Separate networks on one system

Staff, guests, cameras, phones and payment devices each get their own network, with rules for what may talk to what.

Cabled access points

Each access point is wired back to a switch and powered over the same cable, so every one delivers full speed.

One dashboard, any number of sites

Every gateway, switch and access point appears in one place, and we can see and manage it remotely.

A real firewall

Intrusion detection and prevention, content filtering and VPN are built into the gateway.

Room to grow
A Cloud Gateway Ultra is specified for 300+ clients and a Dream Machine Pro Max for 2,000+. Adding an access point or a switch does not mean starting over.

Cameras and doors on the same platform
UniFi Protect cameras and UniFi Access door control run on the same system and the same dashboard.

Side by side

	Store-bought router or mesh kit	UniFi
Networks	One main network, plus a guest network	Many, each with its own rules
Access points	Units relay to each other over the air	Wired and powered over the cable
Management	Phone app, one location	One dashboard for every site, remote
Security	Basic firewall; extras often by subscription	Firewall with intrusion prevention built in
Licensing	Free to run; business features may be a subscription	No license to run or manage
Power for devices	None	Switches power access points, cameras and phones
Mounting	On a shelf	Ceiling, wall, rack or outdoors
Cameras and door access	Separate products and apps	Same platform
Setup	Ten minutes from a phone	Designed and installed; needs cabling

A fair word about the brands

Netgear, TP-Link, Eero and Google all make solid products for the home, and this is not a claim that their hardware is poor. Netgear and TP-Link also make separate business lines that are a different class of product from what is on the shelf at a retail store. The comparison here is between a retail home product and a system designed for a workplace.

When a store-bought router is fine

- A home office, or a one-room office with a handful of devices
- No cameras, door readers, card payments or guest Wi-Fi
- A temporary space you will leave within a year

What it costs

UniFi equipment costs more at the start than a mesh kit, and it needs cable to each access point and someone to design and set it up. In return there is no license or subscription to keep it running, the parts can be added to one at a time, and the system is built to stay in place for years. For most businesses the cabling is the larger part of the job, and good cabling outlasts the equipment plugged into it.

How Smart Life does it

- We walk the building, count the devices and plan access point locations before anything is ordered.
- Access points are cabled and ceiling- or wall-mounted. We do not rely on wireless relays.
- Staff, guest, camera, phone and payment traffic are separated from day one.
- We install the cabling, the UniFi equipment, and the cameras, door access and phones that run on it.
- We can monitor and support the network remotely afterward, and you keep full ownership of it.

UniFi network equipment we install

Select an item for its data sheet.

Cloud Gateway Ultra
Gateway
Small offices: 30+ devices, 300+ clients.
Data sheet (PDF)

Cloud Gateway Fiber
10G gateway
Offices with fast fiber internet.
Data sheet (PDF)

Dream Machine Pro Max
Rack gateway
200+ devices, 2,000+ clients.
Data sheet (PDF)

U7 Pro
Wi-Fi 7 access point
Ceiling-mounted, 6 GHz.
Data sheet (PDF)

U7 In-Wall
Wi-Fi 7 access point
Wall-mounted, with switch ports.
Data sheet (PDF)

Pro Max 24 PoE
24-port switch
Powers access points, cameras and phones.
Data sheet (PDF)

Thinking about UniFi for your building or your company? Tell us how many sites, users and devices. We will lay out the design and give you a written estimate.

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