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An IT Solutions Company

UniFi vs. Licensed Enterprise Networks

Where UniFi fits against Meraki, Fortinet and the rest, and where it does not

Enterprise networking from Cisco Meraki, Fortinet and similar vendors is capable equipment, and for some organizations it is the right choice. It is also sold on a model where the hardware is only the first payment. UniFi, from Ubiquiti, takes a different approach: buy the hardware and run it, with no license to keep it working. For a large share of businesses, including companies with many sites, that changes the math.

This guide is written for the owner, operations lead or IT manager weighing the two. It covers how each is paid for, what each does well, and where licensed gear still earns its cost.

THE SHORT VERSION

- Licensed enterprise gear is paid for twice: the hardware, then a recurring license for each device.
- With some vendors a lapsed license stops the network. With others the firewall keeps running but its security services and updates stop.
- UniFi runs and is managed without a license, including multi-site management and site-to-site connections.
- Licensed gear still fits where a contract, a regulator or a corporate standard calls for it. For many businesses, UniFi does the job for less over the life of the system.

How enterprise networking is sold

The common model is hardware plus a subscription per device, renewed every one to several years. The subscription covers cloud management, security updates and vendor support. What happens if it lapses depends on the vendor:

- **Cisco Meraki.** Under its long-standing co-termination licensing, an organization that falls out of compliance gets a 30-day grace period and is then shut down: devices stop passing client traffic until it is licensed again. Meraki's newer subscription licensing keeps traffic flowing after the grace period, so it matters which model an account is on.
- **Fortinet.** A FortiGate keeps working as a firewall when its subscriptions expire. Services that depend on live updates, such as category web filtering, stop, signature databases stop updating, and firmware upgrades are restricted without a support contract.
- **Others.** Most enterprise vendors follow one of these two patterns. The details change, so read the terms for the specific product before buying or renewing.



How the two are paid for over five years.

What UniFi offers

No license to keep it running
Gateways, switches and access points work, and are managed, with no recurring license.

Local control, central view
Each site runs on its own gateway. One dashboard shows every site, and the network keeps working if the cloud is unreachable.

Site-to-site without fees
Sites connect to each other with built-in, license-free tunnels, in a hub-and-spoke design that supports up to 1,000 locations.

Security built in
Zone-based firewall, intrusion detection and prevention, and VPN are included. An enhanced threat-signature service is an optional subscription.

A range that reaches the high end
From a compact gateway for 300+ clients to one specified for 25 Gbps intrusion prevention and 7,500+ clients, with 100G aggregation switches.

One platform for more than the network
Cameras, door access, intercoms and digital signage run on the same system and the same sign-in.

Side by side

	Licensed enterprise gear	UniFi
Licensing	Recurring, per device	None to run or manage
If payments stop	Network stops, or security services and updates stop, depending on vendor	Keeps running and stays manageable
Management	Vendor cloud or controller, licensed	Local gateway plus a central dashboard, license-free
Multi-site connections	Usually a licensed feature	Included
Threat intelligence	Included in the security subscription	Built-in protection; enhanced signatures optional

	Licensed enterprise gear	UniFi
Vendor support	Contracted, often around the clock, with response targets	Standard warranty and support; paid extended coverage on some products
Advance hardware replacement	Commonly part of the contract	Not at the same contractual level
Cameras and door access	Separate product lines, separately licensed	Same platform
Depth of advanced features	Very deep	Covers what most businesses use; fewer niche features

Where licensed enterprise gear still fits

- A contract or regulator requires a specific certified product, or a named vendor.
- The business needs guaranteed vendor response times and advance hardware replacement written into a contract.
- The network is very large or unusually complex, with advanced access-control or security designs that depend on one vendor's features.
- A parent company or global IT team has standardized on a platform and manages it centrally.

In those cases the license is buying something real. The question is whether your business is using what it pays for.

Where UniFi fits well

- Offices, plants, warehouses, stores and campuses that need reliable switching, Wi-Fi and a capable firewall
- Companies with several sites that want one view of all of them without a per-device fee
- Businesses coming up on a renewal that costs more than the features they use are worth
- Buildings where cameras and door access are going in at the same time as the network

Ubiquiti has also moved quickly. Wi-Fi 7 access points, 10 GbE and 25 GbE switching, larger gateways and multi-site management have all arrived as regular hardware and free software updates.

Moving from licensed gear to UniFi

- **Check the renewal date.** It sets the timeline. Leave enough time to design and test before it.
- **Inventory what is in use.** List the firewall rules, VPNs, networks and features that people actually depend on.
- **Pilot one site.** Prove the design at one location before changing the rest.
- **Cut over site by site.** The cabling stays. The gateway, switches and access points change, usually outside working hours.

How Smart Life does it

- We design, install and manage UniFi networks for single buildings and for companies with several sites.
- We give you a straight answer on fit. If your requirements point to licensed gear, we will say so.

- We document the existing network before changing it, and plan cutovers around your operation.
- The same team installs the cabling, cameras and door access, so one company is responsible for the result.

UniFi equipment for larger networks

Select an item for its data sheet.

Dream Machine Pro Max
Gateway
200+ devices, 2,000+ clients, redundant storage.
Data sheet (PDF)

Dream Machine Beast
Gateway
25 Gbps intrusion prevention, 7,500+ clients.
Data sheet (PDF)

E7
Wi-Fi 7 access point
Enterprise access point with 10 GbE uplink.
Data sheet (PDF)

Pro XG 48 PoE
48-port switch
10 GbE and 2.5 GbE with high-power PoE.
Data sheet (PDF)

Enterprise Campus Aggregation
Aggregation switch
100G and 25G for the network core.
Data sheet (PDF)

Cloud Gateway Industrial
Rugged gateway
Fanless, for plant floors.
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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