



Small Business Networking Resources /

What Is an Access Point?

Understand the importance of how a wireless access point enhances your network and what role it plays. Learn more about the different types of access point configurations.

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What is a wireless access point?

A **wireless access point (WAP)** is a networking device that allows wireless-capable devices to connect to a wired network. It is simpler and easier to install WAPs to connect all the computers or devices in your network than to use wires and cables.

Why use a WAP to set up a wireless network?

Using a WAP lets you create a wireless network within your existing wired network, so you can accommodate wireless devices.

You can also use a WAP or **mesh extenders** to extend the signal range and strength of your wireless network to provide complete wireless coverage and get rid of "dead spots," especially in larger office spaces or buildings. Additionally, you can configure the settings of your WAPs using a single device.

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Common types of access point configurations

Root access point

In this configuration, an access point is connected directly to a wired LAN, providing a connection point for wireless users. If more than one access point is connected to the LAN, users can roam from one area of a facility to another without losing their network connection.

Repeater access point

An access point or mesh extender can be configured as a standalone repeater to extend the range of your infrastructure or overcome an obstacle that blocks radio communication.

The repeater forwards traffic between wireless users and the wired network by sending data to either another repeater or an access point that is connected to the wired network. The data is sent through the route that provides the best performance for the client.

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Bridges

Access points can be configured as root or non-root bridges to join multiple networks. An access point in this role will establish a wireless link with a non-root bridge. Traffic is then passed over the wireless link to the wired network.

Workgroup bridge

Access points that are in workgroup bridge mode can "associate" to other access points as clients and provide network connections for devices connected to Ethernet ports.

For example, if your business needs wireless connectivity for a group of network printers, you can connect the printers to a hub or a switch, connect the hub or switch to the access point Ethernet port, and configure the access point as a workgroup bridge. The workgroup bridge will then "associate" to an access point on your network.

Central unit in an all-wireless network

In an all-wireless network, an access point acts as a standalone root unit. It is not attached to a wired LAN. Instead, the access point functions as a hub that links all stations together. It serves as the focal point for communications, increasing the communication range of wireless users.

Key benefits of upgrading to WAPs

WAPs are a more convenient, secure, and cost-efficient alternative to using wires and cables to connect every computer or device in your network. And using WAPs to set up a wireless network can provide many advantages and benefits for your small business.

For one, a wireless network is more convenient to access. Adding new users is a lot less complicated, too. And you can easily provide Internet access to guest users by giving them a password to access your wireless network securely.

Also you can easily segment users, including guests, to help protect your network resources and assets.

Preparation for the future

When you invest in WAPs that feature future-ready modularity, you are helping to ready your IT infrastructure to support next-generation technologies.

WAPs that meet the new Wi-Fi 6 (802.11ax) standard, for example, can help you build a reliable, scalable, and secure wireless network to handle the rapidly growing number of Internet of Things (IoT) devices—and the data that those devices will create.

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