

# The Small Business Owner's WiFi Checklist

## How to Make Sure Your New WiFi Doesn't Let You Down


Is it time to upgrade your WiFi? Review this checklist to help you save time, money, and ensure a great WiFi experience.

- Gather feedback from ALL employees and customers about their WiFi and network experience.** As the business owner, you likely know how the systems are working for you and the employees you interact with often. But, if you want the whole scoop, be sure to connect with each employee (perhaps via a survey) about their current WiFi experience. If you operate a retail business or if you often have guests use your WiFi, ask them for feedback as well. This will give you and your IT team vital information needed to build out a new network.
- Ask employees and customers about when and where they experience the biggest WiFi slow downs.** Is it when they walk from room to room? Or, when running a certain application? Do they have log-in issues? The more you know, the more you'll be able to address upfront — preventing downtime and frustration later.
- Establish a "WiFi Task Force" team.** By involving your employees, you'll be able to get assistance and real-time information that will help you make proper decisions about your new WiFi network.
- Walk around and ask employees from each department to show you the work they do each day.** Often, you'll discover important devices, software, applications, or websites that you weren't aware of, but that the team uses regularly. This can be critical information when determining how much bandwidth or WiFi coverage is needed. If customers are accessing the Internet through your network, try to determine what their needs are as well.
- Document ALL your employees' processes that require the Internet and Network.** Be sure to document all of this information in an organized format so you can easily share it with your IT company or internal IT staff. This will save time and money on your project.
- Document all your technology-related vendors.** When setting up new networking equipment, it is sometimes necessary to contact software vendors (both local software vendors and Internet-based services), printer vendors, specialty devices, phone systems vendors, and Internet Service Providers, among others. Gather these together in one place with contact names, phone numbers, and emails. This reduces wasted time on your project.
- Test the cabling.** Although this is a wireless Internet project, the devices that allow for wireless access usually need to be plugged in via ethernet cable, which they use for power. This means you don't need to run electricity to the location of your access points; just a cable. Some wireless devices have "mesh technology," which allows an "unplugged" access point to pick up a wireless signal from another access point that has connectivity. However, performance levels drop the more "hops" from one device to another. A best practice is to make sure you test the cable, and that it runs to the locations where you need access point placement.
- Gather device manuals.** Create a list of devices (scanners, printers, tablets, cell phones, watches, and anything in your business that connects to the Internet or network) with either the hard paper copy or the links to their device manuals. Sometimes there are manufacturer recommended configurations or valuable information in those manuals that will assist in a smoother network set-up.
- Create a topology drawing.** Work with your IT company to create a drawing that shows where Internet/network usage will be heavy, where there are a lot of users and a lot of devices, and where the workflows are a little lighter within your building(s).

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- ❑ **Clarify authentication methods and determine security needs.** How do users log in now to the WiFi? To your network? Determine if additional security is needed or if current authentication methods are sufficient.
  - ❑ **Determine logical vlan assignments.** Some parts of your network should be separate from others in order for them to function optimally. A vlan allows for your IT provider to create virtual local area networks for this purpose. For example, your phone system is typically assigned to its own vlan so that other Internet traffic and network traffic doesn't interfere with the quality of your phone calls.
  - ❑ **Make sure your switch is organized.** Nearly all of your wireless access points will connect back to a box on your network called a switch. This device, among other things, acts as a traffic cop on your network. A switch typically has between 8-48 ports in which devices (such as access points) are plugged into. Be sure to work with your IT company to keep wires connected to the switch organized, properly labeled, and in a logical order.
  - ❑ **Use WiFi Survey tools.** Your IT company should have a variety of WiFi survey tools they can use to determine current signal strength, bandwidth, and any issues with the configuration. In addition, these tools can be used to properly plan for proper access point placement on your new network.
  - ❑ **Reconvene.** Once you've gathered all the information, meet with your "WiFi task force." Review the data and determine next steps with an IT service provider.
  - ❑ **If needed, work with an IT professional to choose Access Point and Switch hardware.** With dozens of options on the market, be sure to choose hardware that addresses your business needs today and will scale with your business over the next few years. Avoid purchasing hardware online or at the big box stores as many of those solutions are designed for home use instead of business use.



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