What Is a Network Switch vs. a Router?

What is a network switch and what is a router? The two pieces of equipment look similar and perform some similar functions, but each has its own distinct function to perform on a network.

What Is a Network Switch?

To understand basic networking, you first need to answer the question, "What is a network switch?"

Most business networks today use switches to connect computers, printers and servers within a building or campus. A switch serves as a controller, enabling networked devices to talk to each other efficiently. Through information sharing and resource allocation, switches save businesses money and increase employee productivity.

[Understand](http://blogs.cisco.com/smallbusiness/understanding-the-different-types-of-ethernet-switches/) the different types of Ethernet switches and their capabilities.

What Is a Network Switch: Unmanaged Switches

An [unmanaged switch](https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/switches/small-business-100-series-unmanaged-switches/index.html) works right out of the box. It's not designed to be configured, so you don't have to worry about installing or setting it up correctly. Unmanaged switches have less network capacity than managed switches. You'll usually find unmanaged switches in home networking equipment.

What Is a Network Switch: Managed Switches

A [managed network](https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/switches/small-business-300-series-managed-switches/index.html) switch is configurable, offering greater flexibility and capacity than an unmanaged switch. You can monitor and adjust a managed switch locally or remotely, to give you greater network control.

What Is a Network Switch versus a Router?

Switches create a network. Routers connect networks. A router links computers to the Internet, so users can share the connection. A router acts as a dispatcher, choosing the best path for information to travel so it's received quickly.

What Is a Network Switch to My Business?

Switches and routers are the building blocks for all business communications, from data to voice and video to wireless access. They can improve profitability by enabling your company to increase productivity, trim business expenses, and improve security and customer service.