

Article: [COMPUTERS BEHAVING BADLY](#)

Topic: Home Networking

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For those of you who have more than one computer, have you ever wondered how to establish your own home or small office network?. It may be simpler than you think. Gone are the black magic days when chicken livers were thrown into the air and tea leaves consulted to get a computer talking to other computers. You don't even need a Microsoft Certified Network Engineer.

The main benefit from networking is you can share resources. That is, the functions on one machine can become available to another. For example, on a network, all connected computers can print to the one printer, or surf the web through a shared internet connection. You can also access files on another computer and give them access to your data. If you are blessed with teenage boys they might even like to play network games and 'kill' each other.

To network just two PC's, you only need an Ethernet card (network card) in each PC and what's called a cross-over Ethernet cable. Don't let the names deter you; these bits are readily available from any computer retailer. A network card costs around \$20 and the cable about \$10.

To network more than two PC's, the setup changes slightly. You still need a network card in each PC but now you need a network switch, also called a hub or router. These 'black boxes' simply allow multiple PC's to talk to each other and take all the hard work out of setting up a network. Each PC connects to the switch and depending on the functions of the switch, even modems and printers can be connected as well. Also, instead of a cross-over cable, you now need patch, or straight-thru, cables.

That's the hardware side of things. For the software side of it, if you have Windows XP, it can be very simple. Most of what you need is automatically configured for you, simply plug and play. You may have to adjust any firewall settings if you have internet security software. XP and 2000 users, you have access to a very useful Network Setup Wizard, found in the Control Panel. Windows 98 users have a more manual, hands-on job ahead of you.

Of course, instead of cables running around the floor, there are now a plethora of wireless options available. These can plug straight into an available USB port so have the advantage of not requiring the PC to be opened. They come with a User Guide to help with installation and walk you through each step of the way.

Due to the various options, models and computer setups out there, I have only glossed over the process as a whole, but I hope I have opened your minds to the possibilities and benefits of networking. Instead of buying a printer for each PC in the house, it maybe cheaper to network the PC's and all print to the current printer. It's also cool to email your wife down the other end of the house and ask her "What's for tea tonight Darling?".

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