BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Home Office Network — A Wired Desk, a Separate Work Laptop, and Calls That Don't Freeze

Get the desk a solid connection, keep work apart from family gadgets, and make printing and video calls behave

Plain-English tech help from:
Bill's Home Tech
Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech
(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit · billshometech.com/book

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Most home office problems happen between the router and the desk. Check your employer's rules first. Then give the desk the best connection you can: a network cable is best, mesh Wi-Fi or a coax or powerline adapter is next.

Put the work laptop on its own guest network, away from the family's phones, TVs, and smart gadgets. Expect that move to cut it off from the printer, and fix that with a USB cable, by moving the printer, or with IT's help. Finally, test your upload speed and keep big downloads off the network during calls.

1 The Short Version

A home office lives or dies by its connection. When a video call freezes mid-sentence or a work laptop drops off the company system, it is rarely the computer's fault. Most of the time the desk is simply too far from the router, the Wi-Fi is crowded with the whole family's gadgets, or the work laptop is sharing a network it was never meant to share.

This guide shows you how to fix all three, in the order a professional would. First, get the desk a solid connection, ideally a cable. Second, give the work laptop its own lane so it stays apart from the family's phones, TVs, and smart gadgets. Third, make printing and video calls behave. None of it requires you to be technical, and most of it is a one-time setup.

- A cable to the desk beats the best Wi-Fi for video calls.
- If you can't run a cable, mesh Wi-Fi or a powerline adapter can bring a strong signal to the desk.
- A work laptop belongs on its own network, apart from family devices.
- Always check your employer's rules first. Their IT team has the final say on the work laptop.

- Printers and work laptops on separate networks need a little planning to talk to each other.

> **TIP**
> Before you buy anything, run one test: plug the work laptop straight into the router with a network cable and try a video call. If the call is perfect on the cable and choppy on Wi-Fi, you know the fix is getting a better connection to the desk, not a faster internet plan.

2 Why Home Office Connections Go Wrong

Your internet plan is the water main coming into the house. Your Wi-Fi is the plumbing that carries it to each room. A fast plan does not help if the pipe to the spare bedroom is thin and leaky. Most home office trouble comes from that last stretch between the router and the desk.

Walls, floors, and distance weaken Wi-Fi. So do microwaves, baby monitors, and the neighbors' networks. On top of that, every phone, tablet, TV, doorbell, and smart plug in the house shares the same air. When the grandkids start streaming at 4 p.m., your 4 p.m. meeting feels it.

- Distance and walls: every wall and floor between the router and the desk costs signal.
- Crowding: dozens of family devices share the same Wi-Fi at busy times of day.
- Upload speed: video calls send your picture out, and many home plans have a small upload speed.
- Mixing work and home: a work laptop on the family network can clash with the employer's security rules.

GOOD TO KNOW

Video calls care about upload speed, the speed going out of your house, more than most other things you do online. Zoom's own planning numbers put a high-quality group call at roughly 3 to 4 megabits per second in each direction. Most plans have plenty of download speed but much less upload, so check both numbers on a speed test.

3 First, Check Your Employer's Rules

If the laptop belongs to your employer, it is their equipment and their rules. Many companies have a short remote-work policy that covers home networks, printers, and whether you may plug in your own accessories. Some require their VPN, the secure connection back to the office, to be on at all times. A few forbid connecting the work laptop to anything except the company's own system.

Asking first saves you from building a nice setup that IT then tells you to undo. It also protects you. If something goes wrong, you can say you followed the company's instructions.

1. Look for a remote-work or home-office policy on your company's intranet or in your onboarding email.
2. Ask IT three questions: Is a wired connection fine? May the laptop sit on a separate guest network? Can I print to my home printer while the VPN is on?
3. Write down the answers, or keep the email, so you have them next time.
4. Never install your own software on a work laptop to make the network work. Let IT handle that.

WATCH OUT

Don't turn off the company VPN, security software, or firewall to fix a connection problem, even if a website suggests it. That can break your employer's rules and put company data at risk. If the VPN seems to be the problem, call your IT help desk.

4 The Gold Standard: A Cable to the Desk

An Ethernet cable, the chunky network cord with a clip on the end, is the most reliable connection a home office can have. It does not care about walls, microwaves, or how many phones are in the house. For video calls, a cable is the single biggest improvement most people can make.

If the desk is in the same room as the router, or on the other side of one wall, a cable is easy. Run it along the baseboard with a few clips and you are done. Longer runs between rooms or floors take more planning, but they are still worth it for a full-time home office.

1. Find an open network port on the back of your router or mesh unit. They are usually yellow or labeled LAN.
2. Measure the path along the baseboards to the desk and add a few extra feet. Buy a Cat 6 cable that long.
3. Plug one end into the router and the other into the laptop. If the laptop has no network port, use a USB-C to Ethernet adapter.
4. Use adhesive cable clips or a cord cover along the baseboard so no one trips on it.
5. Check that the laptop shows a wired connection. Then turn its Wi-Fi off and on again so it prefers the cable.

TIP

Many newer laptops have no network port at all. A small USB-C to Ethernet adapter fixes that. If it's a work laptop, ask IT whether they supply one, because some companies only allow approved accessories.

WATCH OUT

Want the cable hidden inside the walls instead of along the baseboard? Bill runs low-voltage network cable through walls himself as part of an in-home visit ($99). He'll look at the route, fish the cable, and finish it with a wall plate at the desk. Larger cabling jobs, such as several rooms or between floors, get a quote on the visit before any work starts. Bill doesn't do electrical wiring or add power outlets; that's a job for a licensed electrician.

5 When a Cable Isn't Practical: Your Other Options

Sometimes the router is in the basement and the office is upstairs at the far end of the house. You still have good choices that get close to a cable's reliability without opening walls.

Option	How it works	Best for
Mesh Wi-Fi	Two or three units spread through the house share one strong Wi-Fi network	Large or multi-floor homes
Mesh with a wired link	Mesh units connected to each other by cable	The most reliable mesh setup
Powerline adapters	Send the network through your home's electrical wiring	Rooms on the same electrical circuit
Coax (MoCA) adapters	Use existing cable-TV wiring as a network cable	Homes with cable jacks in the office
Wi-Fi extender	Repeats the signal from the router	A cheap stopgap; often slower

For a full-time home office, a mesh system or a coax adapter is usually the sweet spot. Extenders are the cheapest option, and they often cut speed and add delay, which is exactly what video calls dislike.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Powerline adapters work well in some houses and poorly in others, depending on the age of the wiring and whether both outlets are on the same circuit. Buy from a store with an easy return policy so you can try them in your own home.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

6 Mesh vs Ethernet: Which Do You Need?

People often ask whether they need mesh Wi-Fi or a cable. They do different jobs. A cable is a private road to one desk. Mesh is better coverage for the whole house. Many home offices end up with both: a mesh system for the family and a cable from the nearest mesh unit to the desk.

- Choose a cable if the desk is reachable and you spend hours a day on video calls.
- Choose mesh if the whole house has weak spots, not just the office.
- Choose both if you can. Put a mesh unit in or near the office and run a short cable from it to the laptop.
- If your mesh units can be linked to each other by cable, called wired backhaul, that is the most reliable mesh setup of all.

Most mesh units have one or more network ports on the back. That means the unit in your office can act as a wired jack for the laptop, even if the mesh unit itself connects back to the router over the air.

TIP

If you're buying a mesh system, check the box or the maker's website for wired backhaul or Ethernet backhaul support and the number of network ports on each unit. Those two details matter more for a home office than the top speed printed on the front.

7 Keeping the Work Laptop Apart from Family Devices

Your home network probably holds a mix of things: phones, tablets, the smart TV, a doorbell camera, smart plugs, maybe a grandchild's game console. Many of those gadgets rarely get security updates. A work laptop holding company files has no business sitting next to them on the same network.

The fix is to give the work laptop a separate network, a lane of its own. If something on the family side gets infected or misbehaves, it can't easily reach the work laptop, and the work laptop's traffic stays out of the family's way.

- A guest network is the simplest way to separate devices. Almost every router has one.
- A VLAN is a more advanced version of the same idea, found on business-style routers.
- Either way, the goal is the same: work on one side, family on the other.
- The company VPN adds another layer, but it's not a substitute for keeping networks apart.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> There are two ways to use the separation. Some people put the work laptop on the guest network. Others put the smart gadgets on the guest network and keep the computers on the main one. Both work. What matters is that the work laptop doesn't share a network with poorly protected gadgets. If your employer gives a preference, follow it.

8 Setting Up a Guest Network for Work

A guest network is a second Wi-Fi name your router broadcasts, kept separate from your main network. It's usually a switch in your router's app. You do not need new equipment.

1. Open your router or mesh system's app on your phone, or its settings page in a web browser.
2. Look for Guest Network, Guest Wi-Fi, or Guest Access, often under Wi-Fi or Network settings.
3. Turn it on and give it a clear name, such as Smith-Office, and a strong password.
4. Look for a setting such as Allow guests to see each other or access the local network, and leave it off.
5. Connect the work laptop to the new network and forget the old main network on that laptop.
6. Test a video call and the company VPN to make sure everything works.

WATCH OUT

Some guest networks shut themselves off after a few hours, or are set to expire for visitors. Check for a time limit in the settings and turn it off, or your work laptop will drop offline every afternoon.

TIP

Many routers only let you plug cables into the main network, not the guest network. If you want the work laptop wired and separated, a mesh or router that supports a wired guest port or VLANs may be needed. This is a good point to call Bill.

9 VLAN Basics, Without the Jargon

A VLAN, short for virtual local area network, splits one physical network into separate lanes. Think of an office building with one front door but locked hallways. Everyone uses the same wires and Wi-Fi equipment, but each group is walled off from the others.

Ordinary home routers rarely offer VLANs. You'll find them on business-style and prosumer gear. For most home offices, a guest network does the job just as well. A VLAN makes sense if you want several separate groups, such as work, family, and smart gadgets, or a wired port that stays separated.

- Guest network: easy, built into nearly every router, good enough for most people.

- VLAN: more flexible, handles wired ports, needs a router or switch that supports it.
- Both keep the work laptop away from family gadgets.
- Neither replaces your employer's own security software or VPN.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Setting up VLANs is fiddly, and one wrong setting can knock devices offline. If a guest network won't cover what you need, have Bill look at your equipment. He can tell you whether your router supports it or whether a different router makes more sense.

10 Printer Sharing Across Separate Networks

Here is the catch with separating networks: your printer can only be on one side. Guest networks are designed so devices on them can't reach the main network, and that includes the printer. So once the work laptop moves to the guest network, it may suddenly stop finding the printer.

There are a few ways to handle that. Pick the one that fits your employer's rules.

Approach	How	Watch for
Plug the printer in by USB	A USB cable straight to the work laptop	Some companies block USB devices
Put the printer on the work side	Connect the printer to the same guest network	Family devices then can't print
Print from a personal device	Email or save the file, print from the family computer	Check company rules on moving files
Wi-Fi Direct	The laptop connects straight to the printer	The laptop leaves the internet while connected

WATCH OUT

Many work VPNs block your laptop from seeing anything on your home network, including the printer, while the VPN is on. That's often on purpose. If printing only works with the VPN off, ask IT rather than switching the VPN off yourself.

TIP

If your printer and devices sometimes lose track of each other even on the same network, my guide "Why Your Printer Says Offline" walks through the permanent fix: billshometech.com/guides/printer-says-offline-the-permanent-fix.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

11 Making Video Calls Reliable

Once the desk has a good connection, a few habits make video calls rock solid. Most of them cost nothing.

1. Run a speed test from the desk, on the same connection you use for calls. Note both the download and upload numbers.
2. If upload is under about 4 megabits per second, ask your internet provider whether a plan with more upload is available.
3. Close extra browser tabs and pause cloud backups and big downloads before an important call.
4. Ask the household to hold off on big downloads or game updates during your meetings.
5. Use a headset or earbuds with a microphone so the laptop doesn't have to cancel echo.
6. Restart the laptop at least once a week. Long-running laptops get sluggish on calls.

TIP

Many routers have a setting called QoS, or quality of service, that lets you put video calls or one device first in line. My guide "Giving Video Calls and TV Priority (QoS)" covers it step by step: billshometech.com/guides/qos-priority-video-calls.

GOOD TO KNOW

If the call is fine but you look dark or sound hollow, that's a camera, light, or microphone issue, not a network issue. My guide "Look & Sound Great on Video Calls" covers that side: billshometech.com/guides/look-sound-great-video.

12 A Backup Plan for When the Internet Goes Out

Even the best setup goes dark when the internet provider has an outage or a storm takes down a line. If you work from home full time, decide now what you'll do, so an outage at 9 a.m. is an annoyance and not a crisis.

- Your phone's hotspot can carry a video call in a pinch. Check your plan's hotspot allowance first.
- Keep the laptop charged. A full battery buys you time if the power blinks.
- A small battery backup (UPS) for the router and modem keeps the internet up through short power blips.
- Save your employer's IT phone number and your manager's number on your phone, not just in email.

WATCH OUT

Before you rely on a phone hotspot for work, ask IT whether it's allowed, and check your phone plan. Some plans slow hotspot data to a crawl after a small allowance.

13 A Tidy, Safe Desk Setup

A good connection is worth protecting. A few small touches keep the cable from being yanked out, the router from overheating, and the equipment safe from a storm.

- Keep the router out in the open, up off the floor, and away from closets and metal cabinets.
- Plug the router, modem, and desk equipment into a surge protector.
- Label both ends of the office cable with a piece of tape so no one unplugs the wrong cord.
- Keep a spare network cable in a desk drawer. They are cheap and do fail.
- Write the guest network name and password on a card and keep it in the desk.

> **TIP**
>
> Take a phone photo of the back of your router and the cables plugged into it once everything works. If anyone ever unplugs something, you'll know exactly where it goes.

14 Quick Troubleshooting

If something stops working after you set it up, go down this list before you call anyone. Most problems are one of these.

What you see	Try this first
Laptop shows Wi-Fi, not wired	Unplug and replug the cable at both ends; try another router port
Cable plugged in, no internet	Restart the router; try a different cable
Work laptop can't find the printer	Expected on a guest network or VPN; see the printer chapter

Guest network disappears	Turn off the guest-network time limit in the router app
Calls freeze at certain times	Others in the house are streaming; try QoS or schedule big downloads
VPN won't connect on the new network	Call your company's IT help desk

GOOD TO KNOW

If the internet is slow everywhere, not just at the desk, the problem may be your plan or the provider, not the wiring. My guide "Is It My Wi-Fi or My Internet? The Wired Speed Test" helps you tell the difference: billshometech.com/guides/is-it-wi-fi-internet-wired-speed-test.

15 Related Guides on My Site

This guide focuses on the network side of a home office. These free guides cover the neighboring topics in more depth.

- A Simple, Reliable Home Office Setup: billshometech.com/guides/simple-home-office-setup
- Wired vs. Wireless, When to Plug in with Ethernet: billshometech.com/guides/wired-vs-wireless-ethernet
- Adding a Wired Connection Without a Remodel: billshometech.com/guides/wired-connection-no-remodel
- Setting up a Mesh Wi-Fi System the Right Way: billshometech.com/guides/setting-up-mesh-right
- Setting up a Guest Wi-Fi Network: billshometech.com/guides/guest-wifi-network
- Give Your Smart Gadgets Their Own Guest Network: billshometech.com/guides/give-your-smart-gadgets-their-own-guest-network
- Landing and Working a Remote Job from Portage County: billshometech.com/guides/remote-job-from-portage-county-setup

TIP

Printing without the house Wi-Fi at all is covered in my Wi-Fi Direct printing guide: billshometech.com/guides/printing-wifi-direct-no-router.

16 When to Call Bill

A home office network touches your router, your mesh, your printer, and your employer's rules all at once. If you'd rather have it done right the first time, that's exactly the kind of job Bill handles. Bill brings 30+ years of professional experience to setups like this.

- You want a network cable run through the walls to the desk, or a mesh unit placed so the desk gets a rock-solid connection.
- You need a guest network or VLAN set up for the work laptop and want it done right.
- The work laptop can't print, or the VPN acts up on the new network.
- Video calls still freeze after you've tried the steps in this guide.
- You're not sure whether your router can do what your employer asks.

Bill's help is $49 for a remote session or $99 for an in-home visit. Running network cable through the walls is done on an in-home visit, and bigger cabling jobs are quoted on the visit before work begins. Call (330) 200-8042 and describe your setup. He'll tell you whether it's a quick remote fix or worth a visit, and he'll always respect your employer's rules for the work laptop.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the desk. A cable beats Wi-Fi, work stays apart from family devices, and IT has the final say.

I want to...	Do this...
Fix choppy video calls	Run a cable from the router or nearest mesh unit to the laptop
Reach a far-away office	Mesh Wi-Fi (ideally with a wired link), or coax/powerline adapters
Keep the work laptop separate	Put it on a guest network, with guest access to the local network turned off
Print from the work laptop	USB cable, printer on the same network, or ask IT about the VPN
Check my speed	Speed test at the desk; look at upload, aim for about 4 Mbps or more
Plan for outages	Phone hotspot (if IT allows) plus a battery backup on the router
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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