

PEAK Class 101: Networking Part II

We'll introduce a couple of new networking terms. These functions can be found on the configuration pages of most routers and knowledge about them will help you tremendously when setting up your very first home network.



Firewall

As with many other networking concepts, the firewall is not something you can see or touch. It is simply a form of protection that guards and protects your home network from threats and attacks from the Internet. A firewall can be in either software or hardware; a router implements a firewall in hardware. Not long ago, a firewall was very expensive and complex. Companies needed to hire specialised engineers to set them up. Nowadays, however, almost all home/small office routers have a built-in firewall function. They are easy to configure and adapt to different networking environments.

DMZ, or Demilitarized zone

The DMZ is a special zone (think of it as an area) on your network that has a different trust level (usually less secure) than the rest of the system. Systems placed within this zone will be exposed to the Internet with little or no protection from the firewall. Such a feature is necessary because for certain purposes, you need external users to have access to parts of your internal network. Typical examples are Web / FTP / mail servers, as they cannot function correctly behind a firewall and need to be in the DMZ.

Virtual server (sometimes referred to as "port-forwarding")

If you wish to retain some level of protection, but still need to make certain systems available to the general public, port-forwarding will be the best choice. Each manufacturer has different naming for this technology, but they all work similarly. Special tunnels (or ports) will be opened in the firewall to allow external access to certain resources on your internal network. All other ports and systems are still protected by the firewall to keep them safe from Internet threats and attacks.

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