

The downfall of using a combine modem/router with your DSL connection

These days Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and IT companies alike are able to offer a combined unit containing both a modem and router. The concept seems like a simple and cheap solution to those who have trouble networking (i.e. attaching devices together by cords), or who simply don't want to deal with the headache of it all and would rather plug something in and surf away as soon as possible. On the flipside, for those who understand the way Internet and computers work, the idea of a combined unit poses trouble.

The problems with putting a modem and router into one box can be many. Generally these types of devices are built and sold to consumers who want a 'quick fix' at the lowest price. It can be concluded, and it certainly has been proven, that going with the lowest bidder is not always the most advantageous investment in the long run. To begin, when something goes down, it will be hard to find out what, or where the exact issue is; is it the router acting strange or is the modem at fault? A technical guru might have to tear the case, if not the box itself, apart to find out the story. In that case, it might be more beneficial to just buy a whole new device. When running a network, you can also reset one device when they are separated and not have the entire system go down. Or, in cases where one device decides to go down on its own, you can be sure the other component is still keeping your connections intact.

Upgrades are a common part of our computer-driven world today, so one should expect that parts here and there will have to be replaced as their life cycle begins to wane. It may be that router standards and wireless features within it will move a step ahead while modems could be moving in another direction, or at a standstill as far as anyone can predict. Keeping your devices separate will allow a lot of flexibility in upgrades and meeting up to industry standards. You'll also be able to maintain the highest speed levels without incurring the loss of replacing an entire unit.

When it comes time to switch ISPs or Internet connections all together (say, from DSL to cable) your combined unit will again not be of much use to you. If you own your own separate modem and router you'll be able to get them to communicate much more easily with your new ISP and, since set-up with a new service always involves surprises, troubleshooting will be a breeze if the 'help-me' rep from the company knows exactly where the problem lies.

If you run streaming video, or use your machines extensively, you'll also always have to beware of overheating in a combined unit. Since you have the box carrying out so much more 'work', it is more likely to go down faster when temperatures rise. In some cases, it might only be the low-capacity modem within the combo unit that is causing the problem. If it were separate from the router you would not only decrease the chances of overheating, but you would also be able to replace the modem with a better version more easily. Not only that, but the 'sharing' of power and resources (such as RAM memory) in the box will be more likely to create longer wait times for pages to load as you surf.

Sure, having a combined unit is easier on the unlearned, and perhaps more tidy than running a bunch of wires through devices here and there, but the costs and implications may not be worth it. If you have to, pay the extra fees to have someone set up the network on your behalf.