

What is a Homelab and how to start building your own?

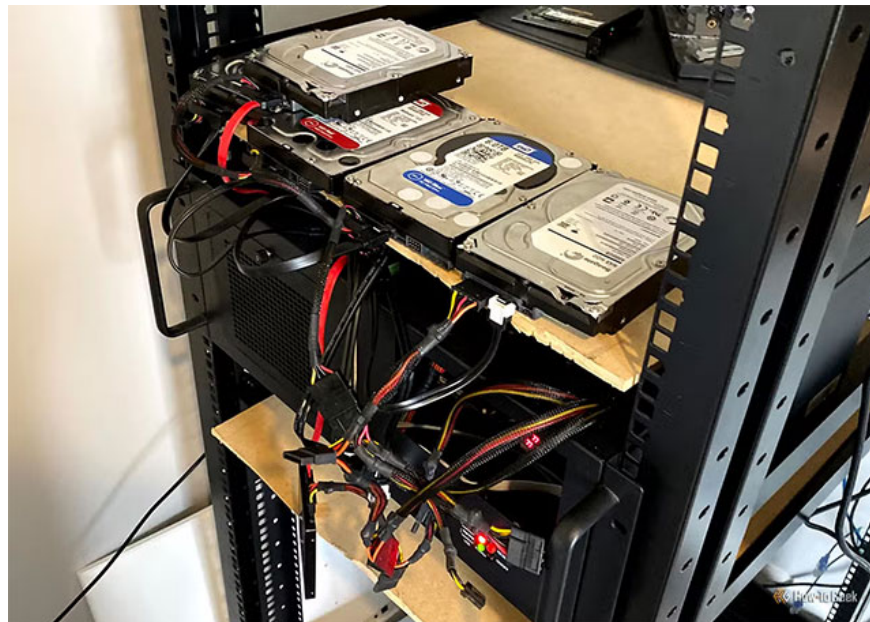
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Have you ever come across the term 'homelab' but not really understood what it is? Actually, the definition of a homelab is quite broad, but in the simplest terms, it is a space for you to 'play' with computers, servers, and networking equipment. Here is everything you need to know about homelabs and how to start building your own.

What is Homelab? You define it!

When it comes to homelabs, you are the boss. It can be simply understood as a computer lab that you run at home. What your homelab includes is entirely up to you. Do you want a large or small homelab? An energy-saving system or an energy-hungry one? Do you want to turn an entire room into a server cabinet with dozens of devices, or just put a few small mini PCs on a shelf?

Ultimately, the decision is yours. What you can achieve with a homelab is limited only by your goals, budget, and the time you're willing to invest.



Components in Homelab

So, what does a homelab consist of, physically? Typically, it's one or more computers running various services in your home. A homelab can be as simple as a Raspberry Pi running Pi-Hole, or a cluster of computers combined in a "high-availability" setup with advanced networking and more.

Overall, what goes in your homelab is up to you.

The average homelab typically consists of a few computers, a network switch, and a storage server. For example, my homelab had just one storage server (which acted as an application server) for four years. Now I operate two storage servers, a Raspberry Pi, an application server, multiple managed switches, patch panels, and other miscellaneous equipment.



Your homelab will grow and change over time, so don't worry too much about comparing yourself to others. Start at any stage and watch your homelab grow.

By technical definition, a homelab is one or more networked servers and other devices where you experiment with different management techniques. The original purpose of a homelab was to learn network and system administration skills for work.

However, today, the definition of a homelab is much broader. As mentioned, a homelab is really anything you want it to be. It doesn't have to be a place where you practice your skills for work.

In fact, you don't have to work in systems administration, database management, computer networking, or anything like that to build a homelab. It's simply a passion or a hobby. So don't let anyone else dictate what a homelab is. As long as you have a few computers at home running the necessary services, you have a homelab — it's that simple!

Anyone can build a homelab

Starting a homelab is easy — don't let anyone tell you otherwise. In fact, you can get started with just a few dollars and a few Facebook Marketplace searches. Finding an old desktop, a used server, or buying a cheap mini PC are all easy these days.

You may even have everything you need to build a homelab. The simplest 'startup' homelab is sometimes just repurposing an old laptop with a broken screen. You remove the screen, use the old one to configure it, and then lean it against the wall. The laptop runs Docker containers — what a creative and cost-effective idea!



Once you have a computer to serve as your server, simply install the services you want and your homelab journey is about to begin! You can choose a server-based operating system like Ubuntu Server, Unraid, TrueNAS or Proxmox. Or start with the familiar Windows. It doesn't matter, as long as your computer can run the necessary services.

Don't get discouraged by the many expensive systems on online forums. Many people invest thousands of dollars in homelabs, making you think that you need a lot of money to do it. This is simply not true.

Homelab doesn't require the latest technology. 10 year old server, 11 year old 48 port switch, 9 year old raspberry Pi 3B... no problem!

The truth is, you can build a homelab with whatever gear you have—old or new. No matter what your hardware is, how outdated or worn out, you can still homelab. Anyone can build a homelab!

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