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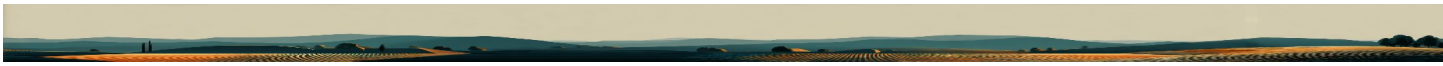
# Your Network Is Down. Now What?

A field guide for business owners and office managers

April 2026



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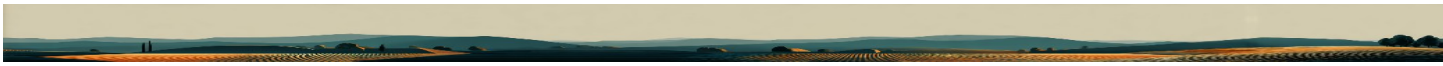

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# Introduction

When your network goes down, the instinct is to panic or start unplugging things at random. Neither helps. In 26 years of running networks for businesses on the Central Coast, I've seen every failure mode there is. Most of them follow a pattern. This guide walks you through that pattern — from the obvious to the serious — so you can find the problem faster or know when to call for help.

One important note before you start: if you have a managed IT provider with monitoring in place, your phone should already be ringing. A good monitoring system sees most of these failures before you do. If no one called you, that's a conversation worth having.

## Start Here — The Nine Most Common Causes

### 1. Physical — A Cable Is Unplugged or Damaged

This is the one nobody wants to admit. A cleaning crew moves a desk, someone trips over a cord, a cable works its way loose from a switch port over time. Before you do anything else, look at the physical connections on your router, switches, and patch panels. Check for link lights.

**What to check:** Green link lights on every network port. No bent, crimped, or visibly damaged cables.

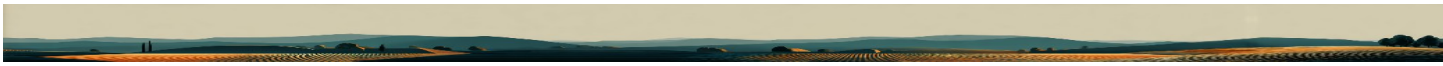
### 2. Power — A Device Lost Power or the UPS Failed

Battery backups don't last forever. Most businesses set them up and forget them. A UPS that's past its battery life will fail silently — and take your network gear down with it when the power flickers.

**What to check:** Is your router, switch, or firewall actually powered on? Check the UPS — does it show a fault light or alarm? When was the battery last replaced?

### 3. ISP Outage — Is It the Internet or Your Internal Network?

These are two different problems. If your internal systems — file shares, printers, phones — still work but you can't get to the internet, the problem is your ISP or the connection between your building and their network. If nothing works, including internal systems, you're looking at something inside your building.



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**What to check:** Can you reach a local device by IP address? Can you ping your default gateway? If yes, the problem is upstream. Call your ISP.

## 4. Wireless Access Point Down

A single access point going offline takes out everyone in its coverage zone. This looks like a network outage but it's actually a localized hardware or power failure. If some people are down and others aren't, and the affected users are all in the same area, start here.

**What to check:** Is the access point powered on? If it's PoE-powered, check the switch port. Try a manual reboot.

## 5. Network Switch Down

A switch going down takes out every device connected to it. This can look like a total outage if it's your core switch, or a partial outage if it's an edge switch in one part of the building.

**What to check:** Link lights on the switch. Is it powered? Try a reboot. If the switch is warm or hot to the touch, it may have overheated.

## 6. IP Address Conflict — Duplicate IP on the Network

Someone plugged in a device — a personal router, an old piece of equipment, anything — that was configured with a static IP that matches something already on your network. Your server. Your default gateway. When two devices claim the same IP address, both of them stop working reliably.

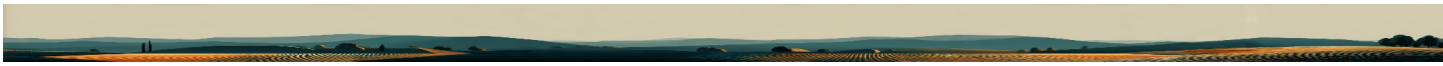
**What to check:** Did anyone add a new device to the network recently? Check your server and gateway — are they responding? An IP conflict usually causes intermittent failures, not a clean outage.

## 7. DHCP Scope Exhausted

Every device on your network gets an IP address from a DHCP server. That server has a pool of addresses to hand out. If your network has grown — more staff, more phones, more wireless devices — and you're still running a flat /24 network (255 addresses), you can run out. New devices can't connect. Existing leases eventually expire and those devices drop off too.

**What to check:** How many devices are on your network? Check your DHCP server — how many leases are active vs. available? This is common in businesses that have added wireless over time without redesigning the network.

## 8. DNS Failure



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DNS is the system that translates names into addresses. When it fails, users can't reach anything by name — websites, cloud services, internal servers. The network is technically up but nothing works. Users report "the internet is down" when really DNS is broken.

**What to check:** Can you reach a website by IP address directly? If yes, DNS is the problem. Check your DNS server or try temporarily pointing a workstation to 8.8.8.8 (Google's public DNS) to confirm.

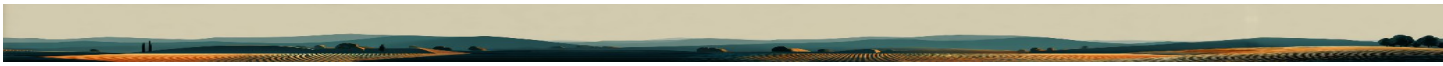
### 9. Cyberattack

If you've worked through the list above and nothing explains what you're seeing — systems behaving strangely, files inaccessible, unexpected reboots, ransom messages — stop. Don't keep clicking around. Don't try to fix it yourself. Isolate affected systems from the network if you can, but don't power them off. Call your IT provider immediately. Time matters.

**What to check:** Trust your instincts. If something feels wrong beyond a normal outage, treat it as an incident until proven otherwise.

## If You Have Monitoring, Use It

A properly configured monitoring system — one that's actively managed, not just installed and forgotten — sees most of these failures before your users do. It tells you which device went down, when it happened, and often why. If you're working through this list manually at 8am while your staff sits idle, you don't have monitoring. You have hope.



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# When to Call for Help

Some of these you can handle yourself. A loose cable, a rebooted access point, a call to your ISP. Others — IP conflicts, DHCP exhaustion, DNS failures, anything that looks like a security incident — need someone who knows your network. If you're not sure, call. The cost of a service call is almost always less than another hour of downtime.

## Lattis can help.

We monitor and manage networks for businesses across San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. If your network goes down, we find out before you do. If you don't have that coverage yet, let's talk about what it would take to get there.

lattisnetworks.com/contact | (805) 470-7666