



NETGEAR Switches

Review From A Customer



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Review by a Real User

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Owner at Alpha Tech

WHAT IS OUR PRIMARY USE CASE?

I'm using them for network switching for SMB. The Insight line is the SMB line, that's what they're trying to break into with this line. I've used them at a country club and at a restaurant, both of which have VLANs. We're using them at our office. I've got them in about eight different locations now, in different environments.

HOW HAS IT HELPED MY ORGANIZATION?

It has saved a lot of time. I haven't tried exporting out the configuration and then importing it into another one, so traditional switches might give you a little bit more that way because you can export out the configs (You can now export out configurations). The web management through one pane of glass for all of my NETGEAR switches has made it a lot easier. It makes it easy to compare settings from other sites when you're trying to duplicate what you've done in the past. You can look at it real quick - without having to remote all the way into a machine, and then try and get into the switch, and remember the IP address of the switch and the credentials of the switch. It's all right there for you. I have a single login for all of my switches. The cloud management has been huge for us. We have 80 clients and they all have switches. We've been migrating them over as much as we can, when it's called for, to the cloud-managed Insight ones. On those sites, we know more information without having to do complicated SNMP traps. We get nice emails, we get a web interface, and we're not having to wait for our RMM tools to get SNMP traffic to notify us. We don't have to do complicated configurations. It's all just part of the simple setup, of joining the switch to an account.

**WHAT IS MOST VALUABLE?**

The remote management has been awesome. With the old-school style of switches, you actually had to be on the LAN, plug into it - you could get in remotely but you had to go through a computer and have other trickery to get in. With this, you literally just log in to a website, see all your clients, all your NETGEAR switches, and you can manage them all right there: the VLANs, powering on and off individual ports, rebooting the whole device, the firmware updates. Everything can be done remotely, so it's pretty awesome for an IT company. It saves time which means more profitability. It's super-easy to use and deploy, probably one of the easiest managed switches I've ever used. I can have it pre-programmed and configured right through the web interface before I even plug it into the customer's site. By linking it to the account and doing the configuration, when I plug it in and turn it on at the client's site it gets the configuration automatically. The web portal is really awesome. I've had to troubleshoot one out of eight, so that's a pretty good ratio. It's a brand new product, so we haven't really sold tons of them yet. The troubleshooting has been pretty easy because we do it remotely and we can reboot the whole device remotely. The only time it has become a problem is when there were multiple failures. We did have one case where the internet had gone out and it was just that the router needed to get rebooted, but we couldn't do anything to the switch because their internet was down. I had to go out there.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT?

I'd like to see a little bit of slowdown on the firmware updates. They've been doing a lot of them. I don't know if that's just because it's such a new product line, but the firmware updates have been a little annoying because they've been coming once a week. For a switch, that's a little extreme. It's worked for the most part, but we've had to power cycle a few devices. We've had to ask customers to manually power cycle them with the power cord, after some of the firmware updates. Their updating needs a little improvement. But if we're talking about a scale of one to ten, as far as hassles go, where ten is a huge hassle, it's been a two. It would be nice if it came in a couple different colors. Right now, they're just white. Some customers want the whole black setup, they want everything to look black and to be black and these only are offered in white. I had one customer not want it because it was white.

WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE SOLUTION?

In the very beginning, we had that one problem with the firmware update where it took them all offline. That was a pain, but that's only been one instance. And it was a major update because they were updating the back-side - the web side - and the hardware side at the same time, and it didn't go so smoothly. We had to have people power cycle them. Other than that, they've been very stable. We're using one in our office and we haven't had any technical malfunctions due to bad manufacturing. We've had no hardware failures.

**WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE SCALABILITY OF THE SOLUTION?**

Scalability is there. They have all the different sized switches. There are definitely options, everything from an 8-port up to even a 28-port with the fiber links. We're doing is SMB, so we're not doing enterprise-level. They added the 52-port switch too. Scalability is going to be great. Hopefully I will get a client that needs a 52-port switch, but for the most part, we're doing the 8s and the 16s, so far.

HOW ARE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT?

Overall, tech support has been good and bad. The first deployment I did, I needed some help but their tech support didn't even know about the products because they were so new. That was months ago. I needed help because I didn't quite understand the licensing and I wanted to talk to somebody. They were a little mystified too. I got past that. When I did an install about a month ago, I needed some help with the VLAN stuff. It ended up being my fault because of the way I was tagging things, the way I had set it up. NETGEAR support walked me right through, noticing the problem and helping me get it fixed. The person I got on the phone blew me out of the water. He just knew everything. He said, "Oh yeah, no problem. Do this. Do that." He walked me right through it. And he spoke English, which was good. I'm a little different than a normal end user because I have a partner relationship. On that one I was getting frustrated and I called my partner rep directly and he put me right into tech support. I don't think I went through the normal channel on that one.

WHICH SOLUTION DID I USE PREVIOUSLY AND WHY DID I SWITCH?

We were using NETGEAR switches and SonicWall routers and access points before, but the price point on those was getting so crazy compared to like what Ubiquity was offering. We started using Ubiquity because they were so cheap. We could do three networks for the same price as one SonicWall, or the NETGEAR enterprise-level stuff, or any of the old enterprise-level stuff, including Cisco. So we went to Ubiquity, did a couple of big networks with it and it was great. But I wasn't super-happy with their web interface. It was getting a little clunky and there were a lot of features missing or labeled as being in BETA when they should've been released already and I didn't like that. We were using both Ubiquity and the traditional NETGEAR managed switches. We made the switch to Insight mainly because of the WiFi. We liked the cloud-based controller for the WiFi. That's why we did Ubiquity. We've probably got a few hundred Ubiquity access points out there. My NETGEAR partner rep called me and let me know about the new Insight stuff. He said, "We're coming out with these to directly compete with Ubiquity and Aruba and the like, and would you give it a try?" I said, "Yeah, I've always like NETGEAR," and we started with the access points. We put in about ten for the first install that we did. It went really smoothly and I liked it. I used the NETGEAR switch at the same time, the 16-port Insight switch. It all went really super-smoothly, even though it was my first time working with this newer style of technology. I did a few WiFi deployments with them and I really liked the manageability. I've loved it ever since. Now we're trying to migrate over to it exclusively. It's the same reasons as the switches, I can get into everything, anywhere, any time, even from my cell phone. If a client calls me up and says "Hey, my WiFi's being weird," instead of having to ask him to go find the cords to unplug it, I can literally reboot it from my cell phone. Same with the switches. That's been a time saver for us, as an IT company and a pain-point saver for our end users because we don't have to ask them to do anything. They love that.



HOW WAS THE INITIAL SETUP?

The initial setup is straightforward. It's literally: Plug it into a network that's on the internet, go to your NETGEAR account, add the serial number, and it activates the device. If you just want to use it as a regular switch, you don't have to do all that. You could just plug it in and use it. If you want use it as a smart switch with the web functions, the cloud-based functions, you have to license it and activate it, but it's a very straightforward process. You buy a token and when you add the device to your account it says, "Hey, you have an available token. Apply it to this device?" "Yes." As soon as the device goes on the internet, it's licensed to your account. It's that easy. It's a network switch so if you're not doing anything fancy with it, deployment takes five to ten minutes. If you have the token pre-purchased, it's even faster than that. You literally just plug it in. That's any switch though, unless if you're doing some programming like VLANing. Then it takes a little bit longer. It depends on the environment. There's no operating system, there's nothing to really configure, depending on the environment. Most SMB clients have very simple environments. WiFi is starting to add to that where people, even in the SMB market, want more VLANs for guest WiFi's and other WiFi's. Out of the eight I've done with the Insights switches, I had to do VLANs for four of them, and it was really easy. The most complicated setup was one where I did a 16-port version and I had to do three different VLANs, so that was a pain. It wasn't even that hard. The switch side was very easy; it was the programming of all the access points. For that one I had to plan a little bit. I had to lay out which WiFi I wanted on which VLAN. When everything is on the switch though, it's very straightforward: Log in to a website, click on that switch, go to the VLAN section and tag it with one of the two or three types of VLAN tagging. I had to figure out which VLAN I wanted on which jacks on the switch, etc. I did it really simply. The first half of the switch was one VLAN and the second half of the switch I split into two more sections. So half of it was one VLAN and the other E-ports I split up into four-port chunks to do a VLAN for each one. I then plugged all my WiFi access points in and my hard-wired computers. So there was some planning. It was more like network development planning than strategizing and worrying about the switch. If you're trying to do a very simple setup and you're not doing anything too crazy with a bunch of VLANs, and you're just trying to set up your small business with a small A-port and you're plugging in a couple computers and a printer, but you want your switch to be on the internet so you know if something goes wrong - for all of that you don't have to be an expert. It is that easy. I normally type in the serial number, but the app on your phone will take a picture of the QR code on the device to add it to the account. It's that easy. It's making me feel like I might not have a job in ten years. With the old ones you had to have a special cable to plug into the switch to get into the console to manage it. No one could do that. Even as an IT person, I hated doing that. It's a night-and-day difference.

WHAT'S MY EXPERIENCE WITH PRICING, SETUP COST, AND LICENSING?

For the price, they're good. If you look at Ubiquity switches (which have cloud features too) or even the regular NETGEAR GS switches, these are still price-competitive and come with the cloud features, which is just amazing. I sold someone a SonicWall and they had to redo their subscription every year. It was a \$300 or \$400 subscription they had to pay every year and I got a small piece of that. With NETGEAR I am getting less from the subscription, because now it's only a \$10 or \$20 subscription per device for the whole year, instead of \$300. But it's easier to sell the product because my clients aren't complaining that they're paying for super-expensive support and licensing for a year. To pay \$200 per SonicWall access point, that's kind of crazy; or Cisco Meraki where you're paying \$300 for the year. Now, you can pay \$10 or \$20 and you have your license and all your support. The cost of the hardware and additional services is really low. It's competing with Ubiquity. We're probably getting a little more margin because the price is so low, so we can squeak in a little bit more margin for ourselves. The important thing, though, is that we're able to supply a better solution to the client. Now, instead of the client spending \$800 to get one WiFi access point, we can do three access points for \$800 and they're just as strong, signal-wise, as the \$800 ones. That means we have a better-deployed mesh network. Instead of just one access point placed as best we could, we have a stronger mesh. We can design a better

network because it's more affordable for small businesses, and that includes the Ethernet switches and the access points.

WHICH OTHER SOLUTIONS DID I EVALUATE?

NETGEARs have been my go-to switches ever since 3Com went away. I've tried other ones too, like TP-Link, a bunch of Intel switches. I tried the HPE switches for a little bit. But NETGEAR has always been easy to use, straightforward, good, and works.

WHAT OTHER ADVICE DO I HAVE?

From an IT vendor's perspective, make sure to get the right licensing. Make sure to get the licensing that allows you to do the tenants and have it all separated. Definitely make sure to get the higher-end licensing, the Pro version and not the Basic or Premium. For end users, my only advice would be to keep it simple. Don't get too crazy with it. It's hard to not keep it simple with these devices. They are made for small business and they are made to be simple. Don't over-complicate things. Just get what you need. They're pretty easy. A switch is a switch and an end user typically is not doing anything too complicated, other than linking a bunch of devices together. It's pretty much just plug it in, for them. Our organization is an IT company, and there's only two of us using it inside the building. He's a network technician and I'm a network engineer. And as a technician, he hasn't had any issues using them either. He hasn't even really needed to call me for help, as an engineer. He hasn't needed my expertise. It's been easy for him and he's new to managed switches too. It's been good. I've been able to let him do stuff in them without having to oversee him, because it's been easy for him. Deployment and maintenance need something like one person for every 100. They're really easy and you can manage them all from one place, in one website. You don't need a lot of people watching over them. It's really easy for one person to watch over hundreds of them. We're actually going to start using it as our Hardware as a Service and start trying to market it that way and push out these devices where we own them and allow clients to use them as a service. We're going to use the NETGEAR stuff for that. They just redid their management on the backside. Before it was either Premium or Basic but now they have the Pro version which allows me to group all my clients together. I can group locations by client and I can give clients direct access to their own stuff too. So I can have admin-level access to all my clients and then give the individual clients direct access to their own stuff, so we're not holding anybody hostage either. It's been pretty cool for that. We've just been really happy with it. We're moving to them as our main networking and WiFi products. I was just at the NETGEAR SMB Council. The Insight product has been out for about a year, and some of the people who got on it when it first came out had a lot of complaints about how it was dumb when it first came out and about the issues they had. They did say it got a lot better for them. I got on the products a little bit later, I didn't get into it until three or four months ago. For me it's been pretty smooth, other than that one update where we had to reboot stuff. So depending on when someone started using the stuff they might have different opinions. The early adopters might not have liked it as much because of the issues they had in the beginning, issues that NETGEAR fixed, going forward. I noticed that some of the partners there who had been using it longer did have a bad taste in their mouths. That was because they onboarded so early that it didn't really have a chance yet. Overall, I would rate the solution a nine out of ten. I will give some stuff a ten, but it's pretty rare. The updating process has been easy, it works over the web, but it's been a little too often, and that's causing email triggers. We get annoyed by the constant bombardment of emails from their devices - and the more devices you have, the more you get bombarded. Any time there's a firmware update, they have to reboot and there's an email notification, so you start to get a lot of emails. The notifications need to be a little cleaner. But from a functional standpoint it's been pretty solid, if we're just talking about just the switches.

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