

Business Internet & Circuit Types, Explained

A plain-English guide for Southern California businesses picking — or reconsidering — their internet and phone circuits.

Most business owners don't think about what's actually running to their building until something goes wrong — a dropped video call, a slow POS system, a phone outage during business hours. The truth is, Southern California has more connectivity options than most people realize, and the right one depends on your building, your budget, and how much downtime you can actually afford. Here's what's out there.

Business Cable / Broadband Internet

The most common and affordable option for small offices. Business-class cable runs over the same coax infrastructure as residential service, just with better support and sometimes an uptime guarantee added on. Speeds are usually asymmetrical — fast downloads, slower uploads — which is fine for browsing and email, but can bottleneck video calls, cloud backups, and VoIP phones once a few people are online at once.

- **Best for:** Small offices (roughly 1–15 people) without heavy cloud or VoIP demands
- **Typical cost:** Lowest of any option on this list
- **Watch out for:** Asymmetrical speeds, and bandwidth shared with other businesses on the same line — speed can dip at peak hours

Fiber Internet (Dedicated Internet Access)

Fiber is the gold standard for a growing business. "Dedicated" means the bandwidth is yours alone, not shared with the business next door, and connections are typically symmetrical — upload speed matches download speed, which matters for video conferencing, VoIP phones, and syncing files to the cloud. Fiber circuits usually come with a Service Level Agreement (SLA): a contractual guarantee of uptime and repair time that cable rarely offers.

- **Best for:** Growing offices relying on cloud software, VoIP phones, or regular video calls
- **Typical cost:** Higher than cable, but often the better value once an SLA and consistent speed are factored in
- **Watch out for:** Availability — fiber isn't built to every building yet, especially older business parks and industrial areas

Fixed Wireless

When fiber hasn't reached a building yet — something we see regularly in older industrial parks and hangars, from Fullerton and the Inland Empire down through San Marcos, Miramar, and the Otay Mesa corridor in South San Diego — fixed wireless is often the fastest real option available. Current coverage data backs this up: fiber networks reach only around 11% of addresses in San Marcos and about 15% in Otay Mesa, which is exactly why several fixed-wireless providers built their business around these corridors. A dish or antenna on the roof talks to a nearby tower instead of a physical line running to the building.

- **Best for:** Warehouses, hangars, and industrial buildings where fiber construction isn't realistic yet
- **Typical cost:** Comparable to fiber, sometimes with a one-time equipment and install cost
- **Watch out for:** Line-of-sight requirements to the tower, and occasional weather sensitivity

T1 and Bonded T1 Lines

T1 is an older, copper-based circuit — slow by today's standards (1.5 Mbps per line) but extremely reliable, symmetrical, and available almost anywhere landline phone service reaches. "Bonded" T1 combines several T1 lines into one faster connection. Most businesses have moved on from T1 as a primary connection, but it still shows up as a backup circuit, or in older buildings where nothing faster has been built yet.

- **Best for:** Backup/failover circuits, or as a last resort where fiber and cable aren't available
- **Typical cost:** High per Mbps compared to fiber or cable
- **Watch out for:** Speed — even bonded, T1 rarely keeps up with modern cloud and video needs as a primary connection

MPLS (Multiprotocol Label Switching)

MPLS isn't internet access by itself — it's a private network that connects multiple business locations together securely, with predictable performance. A company with offices in, say, Orange County and San Diego that needs to share files and phone systems as if they were on one network has traditionally used MPLS to do it.

- **Best for:** Multi-location businesses needing guaranteed, secure connections between sites
- **Typical cost:** Among the most expensive per-site connectivity options
- **Watch out for:** Cost and rigidity — most businesses now use SD-WAN instead for similar reliability at a lower price

SD-WAN (Software-Defined Wide Area Network)

SD-WAN is the modern replacement for MPLS. It intelligently combines multiple connections — cable, fiber, even cellular — into one resilient network that automatically reroutes traffic if one connection drops. For a multi-location business, it's usually a better and cheaper option than traditional MPLS.

- **Best for:** Multi-location businesses that want MPLS-like reliability without the MPLS price tag
- **Typical cost:** Lower than MPLS, scales with the number of sites and connections
- **Watch out for:** Setup complexity — this is a project best handled by whoever manages your network, not a DIY router swap

SIP Trunking and PRI (Voice Circuits)

These are phone-specific circuits, separate from your internet connection. PRI is the older digital standard — 23 phone lines bundled into one circuit. SIP trunking delivers the same phone lines over your existing internet connection using VoIP technology instead. Most new phone systems are built for SIP because it's cheaper and easier to scale up or down as headcount changes.

- **Best for:** Any business moving off an old phone system, or adding/removing lines as it grows
- **Typical cost:** SIP is typically cheaper per line than PRI
- **Watch out for:** SIP relies on your internet connection being solid — worth pairing with a backup connection if phones are business-critical

Cellular / LTE Backup

A secondary internet connection over the cellular network, used purely as a failover if the primary circuit goes down. It won't run a whole office, but it can keep phones, credit card processing, and email alive during an outage.

- **Best for:** Any business where being offline for even an hour is a real cost — retail, medical, legal, distribution
- **Typical cost:** Relatively low as an add-on to an existing setup
- **Watch out for:** Data caps and speed — it's a bridge through an outage, not a full replacement connection

Which One Do You Need?

Most Southern California small businesses land in one of two places: business cable if the budget is tight and the team is small, or dedicated fiber once cloud tools, VoIP, and video calls become part of the daily routine. Multi-location businesses are increasingly choosing SD-WAN over MPLS for similar reliability at a lower cost. Whatever you're running now, it's worth an assessment before renewing a term contract — carrier options and pricing change block by block across LA, Orange, and San Diego Counties, and what wasn't available at your address two years ago might be now.

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