

If you are remodeling a room, adding a home office, or finally getting around to a proper home network, you eventually run into the same question: who actually installs the cable outlets in California? The job feels electrical, but the service is often tied to internet or TV. That gray area between power and data is where a lot of confusion, and a fair number of code violations, tend to live.

I spend a good part of my work life walking into homes and small businesses after someone tried to “just run a cable” themselves or hired the wrong kind of contractor. The result might work on day one, but fails a few months later, or turns out to be out of code when they go to sell or insure the property.

Let us unpack who is supposed to do what, when to hire an electrician versus a low-voltage contractor, how much cabling actually costs, and how to make decisions that will not bite you later.

Electrical vs low-voltage work in California

The first thing to understand is that California distinguishes between standard electrical work and low-voltage systems work.

Standard electrical work deals with high-voltage power. Think 120/240-volt circuits for receptacles, lighting, ovens, air conditioning units. That is classic electrician territory, and it requires a C-10 Electrical Contractor license if you are doing it as a business.

Low-voltage work covers systems that operate at 91 volts or less. This includes most communications and control cabling such as:

- Coaxial cable for cable TV and some internet services
- Ethernet cabling (Cat5e, Cat6, Cat6a, etc.) For networking
- Phone lines and intercoms
- Alarm and security system wiring
- Audio, video, and some smart-home control cabling

That low-voltage work in California usually falls under a C-7 Low Voltage Systems Contractor license, or sometimes a C-10 if an electrical contractor is also licensed and experienced in low-voltage.

The short version: traditional electricians focus on power. Low-voltage contractors focus on data, communication, and control signals.

The gray zone shows up specifically around “cable outlets.” Sometimes you really do want an electrician, sometimes you very much do not.

What does cabling actually do in a home or office?

A lot of people think of “cable” as just the thing you plug your TV into. From a contractor’s standpoint, cabling is a structured way of moving information or power from one point to another.

In low-voltage work, cabling does three primary jobs:

1. It carries data, like internet traffic over Ethernet or DOCSIS signals over coaxial cable.
2. It carries audio or video signals, such as HDMI extenders, speaker wire, or surveillance camera feeds.
3. It carries control or sensor signals, for thermostats, access control, alarm panels, and similar systems.

Textbook explanations talk about the three primary components of cabling as the cable itself, the connectors, and the termination/patching hardware (jacks, faceplates, patch panels, and so on). In the field, I would add a fourth component that matters just as much: the pathway. Conduit, raceway, J-hooks, and framing cavities make or break an installation. A good pathway keeps cable protected, serviceable, and compliant with fire and building codes.

So when you ask “What does cabling do?”, the honest answer is: it forms the nervous system of your home or business. Power wiring is the bloodstream. Cabling is what lets devices “talk.”

Is cabling the same as wiring?

People use “cabling” and “wiring” interchangeably, but in the trades, they often imply different things.

Wiring usually means power conductors governed by the National Electrical Code (NEC), with strict requirements on ampacity, insulation, grounding, and overcurrent protection. That is where you hear questions like: “What is the best wire for home use?” For power, that typically means copper NM-B cable (often called Romex) sized appropriately for the circuit, or THHN conductors in conduit, depending on the installation.

Cabling, at least in the low-voltage sense, covers things like:

- Coaxial cable (RG-6 being common for residential TV and cable internet)
- Twisted-pair data cabling like Cat5e, Cat6, Cat6a
- Fiber optic cable in newer or high-performance installations
- Speaker wire and control cables

Different codes and standards apply. For instance, telecom and data cabling follows TIA/EIA standards along with building and fire codes, while power wiring is driven primarily by the NEC.

A practical takeaway: when a customer asks whether electricians install cable outlets, the first clarifying question should be whether they mean a 120-volt receptacle for powering a cable modem and TV, or a coax/Ethernet jack for the signal itself. Those are different tasks, sometimes done by different trades.

Who installs cable outlets in California?

“Cable outlet” is a catch-all term that trips up both homeowners and new contractors. Let us divide it into what actually exists in the wall.

A typical “cable outlet” might involve:

- A low-voltage box or bracket in the wall
- A faceplate with a coax jack, Ethernet keystone, or both
- Coax or Ethernet cabling from that location back to a central point (often near the main service entrance or media panel)
- Possibly an adjacent 120-volt receptacle to power a TV, modem, or set-top box

In California, the low-voltage parts of that outlet - the coax, Cat6, jacks, and terminations - are squarely in the wheelhouse of a C-7 low-voltage contractor or a cable/internet provider’s in-house technician. Those techs are usually authorized to run coax inside the home, add jacks, and connect to the provider’s demarcation point.

The line-voltage receptacle next to it, on the other hand, is an electrician’s job. If you need a new power outlet installed or moved, you should be calling someone with a C-10 license.

So do electricians install cable outlets? Sometimes yes, in two main scenarios.

First, some electrical contractors maintain strong low-voltage divisions. They carry both C-10 and C-7 or have staff certified in telecommunications cabling. In those cases, one company might handle the power, structured cabling, and terminations in a single scope.

Second, on smaller jobs, an electrician might technically be allowed to run low-voltage cable and install a coax jack, especially if it is incidental to the main work and within their competence. The reality, though, is many electricians are not deeply trained in signal loss, interference, TIA/EIA cabling practices, or networking, so quality can vary.

From a homeowner's perspective, the more reliable approach is simple: power outlets and panel work go to an electrician. Network, coax, and structured cabling go to a reputable low-voltage contractor or a structured cabling integrator.

Electrician or low-voltage contractor: how to decide

Choosing between an electrician and a low-voltage contractor depends less on labels and more on what you are actually trying to accomplish.

If the job involves extending or modifying 120/240-volt circuits, adding dedicated circuits for a media room, moving a panel, or dealing with load calculations, that is a clear electrician job. The risks of getting it wrong involve fire, shock, and code violations.

If your main questions look more like "What are the three types of cabling I should run for this room?" or "What is the most common type of cabling used in networks?", you are talking to the low-voltage side. For home and small offices, structured cabling typically centers on:

1. Twisted-pair copper, usually Cat6 in new installs, sometimes Cat5e in budget retrofits.
2. Coaxial cable, usually RG-6 for cable TV and internet.
3. Fiber optic cable in premium or future-proofed installations, especially between floors or to a detached office.

When someone asks me what the 5 types of cable are, in a real-world residential and light commercial environment, I usually list something like this: NM-B power cable, THHN in conduit, coaxial RG-6, Cat6 twisted pair, and 16/2 or 14/2 speaker/control wire. There are many more in the codebooks, but those are the ones that actually end up in walls most often.

So, if your project involves picking and running those data or signal cables, balancing bandwidth vs cost, or planning a structured cabling layout, that is prime territory for a low-voltage contractor.

What are the three primary components of cabling?

From a planning and budgeting standpoint, when we talk about the three primary components of cabling, we are usually referring to:

1. Horizontal cabling: the runs that go from a central point, like a network rack or media panel, out to each outlet location.
2. Backbone cabling: the larger or higher-performance runs connecting floors, buildings, or major equipment rooms.
3. Termination and patching hardware: patch panels, jacks, faceplates, and cords that make the system usable and maintainable.

When you ask “How much does cabling cost?”, you are not just paying for the bulk cable. You are paying for those three components to work together: the runs themselves, the infrastructure that interconnects them, and the expertise to terminate and test them properly.

How much does cabling cost in California?

Costs vary by region, access conditions, and scope, but there are some realistic ranges I see on projects in California.

For a straightforward residential retrofit where walls are mostly closed, adding a single new coax or Ethernet cable outlet usually lands in the 150 to 400 dollar range per drop, depending on:

- Distance from the central point
- Whether pulling cable is easy (open basement or attic) or difficult (tight crawlspace, flat roof, plaster walls)
- Need for new power at that location
- Type of cable (Cat5e vs Cat6 vs Cat6a vs fiber) and hardware quality

Larger structured cabling projects, such as a small business office with a dozen or more drops, generally are priced by the drop. In many California markets, full-featured network drops (Cat6, tested, labeled, terminated to a patch panel) often fall in the 150 to 300 dollars per drop range in typical conditions. Tricky conditions, prevailing wage requirements, or specialized environments can push that higher.

If you are comparing providers and someone offers to “wire your whole house” for a fraction [Cabling Services Provider California](#) of those numbers, you need to ask hard questions. Improper cable type, no testing, unlisted components, or cables run in unsafe pathways can create real problems later, especially when you try to sell or when you upgrade your network equipment.

Is cabling difficult?

From a purely mechanical standpoint, pulling cable does not look like rocket science. The part that makes cabling difficult is doing it right, on purpose, under real constraints.



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On paper, you simply route from point A to point B. In practice, a good installer must:

- Respect bend radius limits so you do not kink the cable and degrade performance.
- Keep separation from power wiring to reduce interference, especially for Ethernet.
- Follow plenum and riser rating rules so the jacket type matches the airspace and fire rating.
- Plan pathways that future technicians can understand and service.
- Terminate cleanly and test, not “crimp and pray.”

For example, Cat6 cable is relatively forgiving for a single short run in a home. You can get away with more than you should. Scale that to 24 or 48 drops in an office, with PoE devices, long cable lengths, and bundles in hot ceilings, and all the little mistakes start to matter. Suddenly someone is asking why their new access points keep dropping connections.

DIYers often underestimate this. They ask whether cabling is difficult, run a few cables, and only realize the tradeoffs when they have to fish lines through fire-blocked studs, match existing paint after cutting access holes, or troubleshoot intermittent connectivity.

So, no, cabling is not mystically hard. But professional cabling that stays reliable through upgrades and inspections is a discipline. It is one reason bringing in a low-voltage contractor instead of trying to improvise through your electrician can be worth the money.

What is the most common type of cabling used in networks?

If we focus on small office and home networks, the workhorse is still unshielded twisted-pair copper, usually Cat5e or Cat6.

In new installations in California, Cat6 has largely become the default for most decent contractors, because:

1. It comfortably supports 1 Gbps at full channel length, and 10 Gbps at shorter distances.
2. The material cost difference from Cat5e is modest compared to total labor.
3. It provides a better margin for PoE applications.

Cat5e still appears in budget retrofits, or in situations where the owner insists on minimizing upfront cost and does not expect to need more than 1 Gbps. Cat6a and fiber show up in more demanding or future-focused environments.

For residential work, running Cat6 everywhere is usually a sensible answer to the question, "What is the best wire for home use for networking?" It may be slightly more rigid than Cat5e and a bit trickier to terminate, but a competent low-voltage tech will handle that routinely.

Where do cable providers fit into this?

People often ask, "Who is the cheapest cable provider?" when what they really need to know is: what does the provider handle versus what should a contractor do?

Cable and internet providers in California typically handle:

- The connection to the street or utility easement
- The demarcation point on your building
- A basic interior run or two for coax, sometimes more in promotional packages
- Modem and gateway setup, occasionally limited Wi-Fi configuration

They are not structured cabling designers. Their technicians work quickly, with a strong focus on activating service, not designing your internal network for long-term performance. The cabling inside your home, beyond their basic responsibility, is your domain.

Relying on the provider to "wire your house" almost always leads to spaghetti: cables tacked along baseboards, splitters in odd places, and mystery runs that no one labels.

If you want clean, documented cabling, and cable outlets exactly where you need them, a low-voltage contractor or experienced structured cabling installer remains the right call. The provider then plugs into that infrastructure instead of building a temporary workaround.

What are the three types of cabling you actually need to think about?

Standards textbooks list many cabling categories, but for an actual homeowner in California planning for new cable outlets, three broad types tend to matter most:

1. Coaxial cabling: primarily RG-6 for TV and some internet services. It handles radio frequency signals and is still required by many cable companies. Even streaming-focused households often keep a coax run or two as a backup.
2. Ethernet cabling: Cat6 or better for hardwired networking. It connects your modem or gateway to switches, access points, desktops, smart TVs, and other devices that benefit from stable wired connections.
3. Fiber cabling: less common in single-family homes but increasingly relevant for backbones between floors, detached offices, or properties that already have fiber delivered to the premises.

In a lot of remodels, people think only in terms of coax for TV. A good low-voltage contractor will nudge the design toward more Ethernet, sometimes even combining both in a single dual-gang outlet: one coax jack, two Cat6 jacks, with a nearby power receptacle [Cabling Services Provider California](#) that an electrician installs.

The 5 types of cable you actually see in modern homes

When code books talk about “What are the 5 types of cable?”, they wander into classifications that most homeowners never encounter by name. Practically speaking, here are the five you will run into most when you add cable outlets and low-voltage systems in a California home:

1. NM-B power cable such as 14/2, 12/2, 10/2 for branch circuits, usually behind your standard outlets and lighting.
2. THHN/THWN conductors in conduit for certain exterior, garage, or service applications.
3. Coaxial RG-6 for TV and internet.
4. Cat6 twisted-pair Ethernet for networking.
5. Low-voltage control/speaker cable, often 16/2, 16/4, or similar, for speakers, doorbells, and some smart-home devices.

The first two are an electrician’s standard kit. The latter three belong to the low-voltage world. That is one more reason to separate the conversation about power outlets from the conversation about cable outlets for TV and networking.

Planning cable outlets during remodels or new builds

The best time to get cable outlets right is before the drywall goes up. I have lost count of the times someone called me back to open fresh paint because they “forgot” to run Ethernet to a home office, or they realized the TV wall needed power and cable in a different spot.

During design, walk each room with your electrician and your low-voltage contractor, ideally together. For each TV, desk, or media location, decide:

- Where the screen or workstation will physically sit on the wall
- Where furniture will land, since that often blocks standard outlet heights
- How many data points you want now, and what might be helpful in five years

A common best practice is to install a dedicated 120-volt outlet and at least two Cat6 jacks at any serious media or office location. Add coax if you expect to use traditional cable TV or a cable box. That way, you are not locked into Wi-Fi for devices that benefit from a stable wired connection.



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When the trades coordinate, the electrician installs power at the correct height and on the right circuits, while the low-voltage installer builds a structured pathway back to a central panel or rack. The homeowner sees a single clean outlet cluster, not patched and piecemeal upgrades.

Practical guidance: who to call, and in what order

When you are standing in a room staring at a blank wall, unsure whether to call your electrician or an internet provider, a simple decision path helps.

First, if you are missing a power outlet where your TV, modem, or equipment will live, call an electrician. You need safe, inspected power in the right location. That is non-negotiable.

Second, if what you are missing is the signal outlet - coax, Ethernet, or structured cabling - call a low-voltage contractor or structured cabling specialist. That is the person who will answer questions like, "Is cabling the same as wiring?", "What is the most common type of cabling used in networks?", and "What are the three primary components of cabling in my home?"

Third, once your internal cabling is in place, schedule your cable or internet provider. Let their technician connect service to the infrastructure you already have, rather than improvising runs through closets or along baseboards.

In larger remodels, bring both trades to the table early. Let the electrician handle panel loads, branch circuits, and receptacles. Let the low-voltage contractor design and install the cabling that feeds all your devices. When they coordinate, you get safer power, better network performance, and a cleaner result.

California's licensing structure reflects a simple reality in the field: the skills and codes that govern power wiring are not the same as those that govern low-voltage cabling. When you treat "cable outlets" as low-voltage

infrastructure that deserves the same planning as your electrical layout, you avoid a lot of headaches. You also end up with a home or office that is easier to upgrade, easier to service, and much more pleasant to live or work in.