If you live in California and you are planning to add outlets, move them, or run new lines for internet and media, you quickly run into a practical question: should you call a licensed electrician, or a low voltage cabling specialist?

From the outside, they both "run wires." In practice, they work under different parts of the code, carry different licenses, and solve different problems. Hire the wrong person and you can end up with failed inspections, mysterious connectivity issues, or a wall you need to open a second time.

I work with both electricians and cabling contractors on California projects. The pattern I see is the same: projects go smoothly when the homeowner understands where the dividing line sits between power wiring and low voltage cabling, and who is actually allowed to do what.

This is a practical guide to help you sort that out.

Electrician vs Cabling Specialist: What Each Actually Does

An electrician in California typically holds a C-10 electrical contractor license. Their world is 120 and 240 volt power, service panels, breakers, grounding and bonding, lighting, and standard electrical outlets. They are the ones who make sure your home meets the California Electrical Code and passes city inspections.

A cabling specialist usually works under a C-7 Low Voltage Systems license, or operates as a technician for a low voltage contractor. Their focus is on systems that run at 50 volts or less. That includes ethernet, coax for TV, structured cabling, security cameras, doorbells, audio, and sometimes building automation.

Both deal with "wires," which leads to a common question: is cabling the same as wiring? Technically, wiring is the broader term. Cabling is usually used for signal or communication lines that carry data or low voltage signals. Your electric cooktop is wired. Your Wi-Fi access points and TVs are cabled.

When you say "outlet," it can mean three very different things:

1. A standard electrical receptacle for plugging in appliances.
2. A coax outlet for TV or internet.
3. A data or ethernet outlet for your network.

The first is unquestionably electrician territory. The second and third are typically handled by a cabling specialist, unless you hire a full-service electrical contractor that also offers low voltage work.

What Does Cabling Do, Exactly?

Homeowners often think of cabling as "the internet line" or "the cable for TV." In reality, cabling is the backbone that quietly connects almost every low voltage system in the house.

At a basic level, cabling does three things:

First, it carries digital data. That might be internet traffic over ethernet, video streams from security cameras, or audio for a whole-home sound system.

Second, it transports low voltage power for certain devices. For example, Power over Ethernet (PoE) can deliver both data and power over a single Cat6 cable to cameras or access points.

Third, it ties individual devices back to a central location so that your network, security, and entertainment systems are actually manageable and upgradable.

From a design perspective, cabling is about planning pathways that will support your needs for at least 10 to 15 years, because once the drywall is up, changes get expensive.

Common Types of Cabling in Homes and Small Offices

People ask two related questions here: what are the three types of cabling, and what are the 5 types of cable? The answer depends on whether you are talking about broad categories or specific cable constructions.

If you zoom out, three major cabling types dominate home and light commercial work:

1. Twisted pair copper, like Cat5e, Cat6, and Cat6A for networks.
2. Coaxial cable, usually RG6, for television, cable internet, and some satellite systems.
3. Fiber optic cable, used more and more for high speed backbones and sometimes as the primary internet feed.

If you want a little more detail, you could break it into five common cable families that show up in California homes:

- Nonmetallic sheathed cable (often called Romex), for typical 120 or 240 volt branch circuits. This belongs in an electrician's world.
- Category cabling such as Cat5e, Cat6, and Cat6A, for ethernet and some phone lines.
- Coaxial cable, typically RG6, for TV, satellite, and some ISP connections.
- Speaker cable and low voltage control wire, used for audio, doorbells, thermostats, and sensors.
- Fiber optic cable, either single-mode or multi-mode, for very high bandwidth runs.

When someone asks, what is the most common type of cabling used in networks, the answer is still twisted pair copper, especially Cat6 in new construction and Cat5e in older buildings. Fiber is gaining ground for specific runs, but inside most homes, you will see blue or gray Cat6 as the workhorse.

The Three Primary Components of Cabling Systems

Professional cabling is more than "run a wire and crimp a connector." When we design a structured cabling layout for a home or small office, we think in terms of three primary components:

Pathways and spaces come first. These are the studs, conduits, raceways, cable trays, and closet locations that determine where and how cables travel. Poor pathways lead to damaged cables, signal loss, and a lot of frustration later.

The cable plant sits inside those pathways. That includes the actual cables, their ratings (plenum, riser, in-wall), how many are pulled to each location, and how much slack is left for future re-termination.

Endpoint hardware and terminations complete the picture. That covers keystone jacks, faceplates, patch panels, distribution blocks, and the test results that verify everything was terminated correctly.

If any one of those three components is weak, the system becomes fragile. A common example: beautiful Cat6 runs that all terminate into a cheap plastic “splitter” in a closet instead of a proper patch panel and switch. It works for a while, then strange issues crop up.

When You Need an Electrician for Outlets in California

For any standard 120 volt or 240 volt outlet, you should be talking to a licensed electrician. California treats power wiring seriously, and the rules are not suggestions.

An electrician is the right call when you want to:

- Install new receptacle outlets where none currently exist.
- Move an outlet to a new stud bay or a new wall.
- Upgrade ungrounded or two-prong outlets to properly grounded three-prong.
- Replace old aluminum wiring or undersized circuits.
- Add dedicated circuits for appliances, EV chargers, or home offices.

Most cities and counties in California require permits for adding new branch circuits or significant alterations. A C-10 contractor knows when a permit is required, how to pull it, and what the local inspector expects. They also know how to work within Title 24 energy standards and any local amendments.

The question “what is the best wire for home use” usually comes up in this context. For typical residential branch circuits in California, copper NM-B cable is the standard choice. For 15 amp general lighting circuits, that usually means 14 AWG copper. For 20 amp receptacle circuits in kitchens and general areas, 12 AWG copper is typical. There are exceptions, but if your electrician suggests something wildly different, you should ask them to explain.

Using the right cable rating also matters. For example, you might need different jackets for in-wall versus in-ceiling versus outdoors. An electrician will match the cable type to the environment, fire rating, and code requirements.

When a Cabling Specialist Is the Better Choice

If you are talking about coax outlets, ethernet jacks, or structured media panels, you are squarely in cabling territory.

A cabling specialist is usually the better choice when you need to:

- Add or move ethernet outlets in bedrooms, offices, or behind TVs.
- Run coax for TV or cable internet to new rooms.
- Create a structured cabling panel or network rack in a closet or garage.
- Wire a small office or home office to support multiple workstations and access points.
- Install low voltage system wiring for cameras, audio, or access control.

Many homeowners ask, do electricians install cable outlets? Some do. There are electrical contractors who have in-house low voltage teams, especially on new construction projects. On small remodels, a solo electrician might run a couple of coax or Cat6 lines if they are comfortable with that work.

The difference is in depth of expertise. An electrician may know how to pull and terminate a cable. A dedicated cabling specialist knows how to design your network topology, avoid interference, ensure category compliance, and test every run with proper equipment.

That is why network cabling often feels like wizardry to homeowners. The physical work looks simple, but small Cabling Services Provider California mistakes in bend radius, jacket damage, or termination technique can quietly throttle your speeds.

Is Cabling Difficult?

From a DIY perspective, people often ask, is cabling difficult? The honest answer is that basic cabling is accessible, but truly reliable cabling is less forgiving than it looks.

Running a single Cat6 cable through an open stud bay and crimping a plug is something a careful homeowner can learn. Running 20 or 30 drops across multiple floors, keeping everything within spec, and producing test reports that show full gigabit or multi-gigabit performance is another level.

In California, there is a legal side as well. Low voltage work sits in a separate license category for a reason. If you are simply fishing one extra line for your own use in a single family home you own, most jurisdictions will not come after you. Once you start doing larger scopes, or working in multi-unit buildings or commercial spaces, the code, permit, and liability picture changes sharply.

A good heuristic: if you are touching other people's units, shared spaces, or anything connected to life safety systems, leave it to licensed pros.

How Much Does Cabling Cost?

“How much does cabling cost?” is one of those questions where a single number is misleading. Costs depend heavily on access, building construction, finish level, and scale.

For California homes and small offices, a very rough range for low voltage cabling runs looks like this:

For new construction, where walls are open, you might see per-drop pricing in the 75 to 150 dollar range for typical Cat6 or coax runs, including terminations at both ends. That assumes a reasonable quantity of runs and a clean layout.

For finished spaces where the contractor has to fish through existing walls and work around insulation, fire blocks, and existing utilities, per-drop pricing can run 150 to 300 dollars or more. High end homes with tight aesthetic constraints or difficult access can go higher.

Full-home structured cabling for a mid-size house in California often ends up in the 2,000 to 8,000 dollar range, depending on the number of drops, the mix of copper and fiber, and the quality of hardware. A small office network cabling job can range from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands for larger layouts.

Cable itself is usually the smallest line item. Labor, access, and finish work dominate the cost. If someone quotes you a remarkably cheap price, ask what is included: testing, labeling, patch panels, and documentation are not optional if you want a robust system.

Who Is the Cheapest Cable Provider?

People often conflate in-home cabling with their internet or TV provider and ask, who is the cheapest cable provider?

Those are related but separate decisions. Your cabling contractor handles everything from your modem location inward. Your cable provider handles the connection from the street or demarcation point to your modem, along with the monthly service.

Prices for providers like Comcast Xfinity, Spectrum, Cox, Frontier, or local fiber operators vary by region, promotion cycle, and whether you bundle services. There is no single provider that is always cheapest across California. The “cheapest” option also shifts once you factor in equipment rental fees, data caps, contract terms, and how long promotional pricing lasts.

From a cabling standpoint, the more important question is flexibility. A good low voltage layout keeps your options open so you can switch providers later without re-wiring your house. That might mean pulling an extra conduit from the point of entry to your wiring closet, or running both coax and ***Cabling Services Provider California*** ethernet to a few key locations.

Your cabling contractor should not be married to any one provider. If they are, pay attention to whether recommendations are serving your long term interests or a particular vendor relationship.

The Gray Zone: Projects That Need Both Trades

Many real projects in California straddle the line between electrician and cabling specialist. A few examples I see often:

You want a home office with multiple screens, wired internet for stability, and enough outlets to avoid power strips. An electrician should design and install dedicated power circuits and receptacles. A cabling specialist should run multiple Cat6 lines, possibly fiber to the office from a central location, and set up a small patch panel.

You are remodeling a living room and adding a wall mounted TV with no visible wires. The electrician handles power inside a recessed TV box or behind the mount, and ensures the circuit is sized and protected correctly. The cabling pro handles HDMI over structured cable, coax if necessary, and ethernet for streaming or a media cabinet.

You are building an ADU and want it to feel like part of the main house network. The electrician wires the ADU's electrical system to meet code. The cabling contractor runs a proper data link, often fiber or multiple Cat6 lines in conduit, so the ADU can share internet, cameras, and maybe door access.

On jobs like these, coordination matters more than which individual you call first. Ideally, you want a contractor or project lead who understands both worlds and can sequence the work so that nobody closes a wall before the other trade is finished.

Quick Guide: Electrician or Cabling Specialist?

This is a good place for a fast, practical checklist.

- Choose an electrician if you are adding, moving, or upgrading 120 or 240 volt outlets or circuits.
- Choose a cabling specialist if you are adding or moving ethernet, coax, or low voltage outlets.
- Choose both if you are building a home office, media room, or addition that needs new power and network connectivity.
- Choose a contractor with both C-10 and C-7 capabilities if you want a single point of responsibility for mixed power and low voltage work.
- Call your local building department if you are unsure whether a permit is required for what you are planning.

If you keep that mental map in mind when you describe your project to contractors, you are much more likely to get accurate bids and realistic timelines.

Safety, Code, and Liability in California

California has a reputation for strict building codes, and in electrical work that reputation is earned. The goal is safety, not bureaucracy.

Mixing power and low voltage incorrectly can create real hazards. A few patterns I still see on older or DIY work:

Running Ethernet or coax in the same conduit as 120 volt power, which violates code and can induce noise or damage low voltage equipment.

Using non-rated cable in plenum or return air spaces, which can produce toxic smoke in a fire.

Adding "bootleg" outlets without proper grounding, which can make surge protection and GFCI protection unreliable.

If an unlicensed person creates a hazardous condition and a fire or injury results, homeowners can find themselves in an ugly position with insurance and liability. This is one reason it is worth confirming that your electrician holds a C-10 license and your low voltage contractor has an appropriate C-7 or related license with the California Contractors State License Board.

Even when the law does not strictly require a permit for a small low voltage job, you should still expect professional practices. That includes cable support, proper separation from power lines, correct terminations, and labeling.

Planning for Future Capacity

One of the easiest ways to waste money is to run just enough cabling for what you own today. Most of the cost is in access and labor. Once someone is already fishing a line across the house, adding a second or third pull to the same location is usually marginal.

When clients ask for the “best wire for home use” in the networking sense, my default for California homes is:

Cat6 for most runs to bedrooms, offices, and TVs, which supports 1 gigabit easily and can handle 2.5 to 5 gigabit over shorter distances with good hardware.

Cat6A for backbones or key locations where you might eventually want 10 gigabit, like between a central closet and a home office or media room.

RG6 coax to main media locations, unless you are certain you will never use cable or satellite.

Fiber between main distribution points in larger or multi-story homes, even if you do not terminate it right away. Dark fiber is relatively cheap insurance.

A cabling specialist with current experience can match these ideas to your specific floor plan and budget. An electrician might know parts of this story, but it is not their primary training.

Questions to Ask Before You Hire

Whether you lean toward an electrician or a cabling specialist, a few targeted questions make it much easier to gauge their competence.

- What California license do you hold, and what part of this project falls under that license?
- How will you route cables or wiring, and what will you need to open or patch?
- What cable types do you plan to use, and why those instead of alternatives?
- How do you test your work, and will I get any documentation or test reports?
- Who will coordinate with the inspector or utility, if those are involved?

Pay attention to how specific and confident the answers are. A pro might not have every detail on the spot, but they should be able to explain their general approach and how they handle edge cases, like difficult cable paths or unexpected framing.

Choosing between an electrician and a cabling specialist for outlets in California is less about labels and more about voltage, code, and long term performance. If the outlet deals with power, lean on a licensed electrician. If it carries data or TV signals, a cabling professional is usually the right partner. When projects cross both worlds, invest a bit of time in planning and coordination, and the result will serve you quietly for years.