First Try in Homelab Journey

The idea for my homelab began when I first saw Pi-hole at my friend's house and discovered how it works. He had set it up on an old laptop as a simple DNS server designed to remove ads. I was amazed by the data it produced and the ability to curate my own lists of malicious sites for DNS filtering. More importantly, it sparked a curiosity within me, revealing just how little I knew about that aspect of technology.

At the time, I was working as a tech support specialist at a small college, primarily engaged in troubleshooting, password resets, and hardware repairs. I had a genuine interest in the hardware side of computers. I enjoyed taking them apart, putting them back together, fixing small components, and exploring the intricate parts of motherboards. I already owned a custom-built PC that mainly served as a gaming machine, but it also doubled as a personal project, allowing me to learn about the various components and how they fit together.

Despite my enthusiasm for hardware, I felt like a stranger to system administration, networking, and the server side of IT. While I had a basic understanding, my knowledge was limited. I can admit that I was somewhat intimidated by networking, something that resembled an intricate spider web. During this time, I began focusing more on cybersecurity and data integrity, motivated by my experiences at work as well as my personal concerns. After losing access to some personal files, I became reactive and realized I needed to learn how to be more proactive. I explored numerous articles and online videos, which only deepened my curiosity. This led me to my first introduction to DNS, its purpose, and a desire to delve into something new. Acknowledging my ignorance, I understood that the only way forward was through knowledge. While I believe mistakes can be valuable learning experiences, I disagreed with the notion that I had to make them to progress. I spent time researching online, learning how to set up my server and run a Pi-hole DNS server. I watched YouTube tutorials demonstrating various methods and gained firsthand experience from my friend’s setup.

In my second job, which was similar to my first, I was assigned an exciting project: decommissioning an old data center and setting up a small data center for a few professors to use in their labs. This opportunity allowed me to set up servers and create a small cluster for myself. Although it was isolated from the internet, making it perfect for testing, I found it to be my first real experience with a homelab and server management. While this was technically a school environment, my work on this project is best described as a homelab since I was running several open-source applications on my own.

I installed Proxmox on the system as the main hypervisor, setting up a cluster of two servers and one running Proxmox Backup Server. Although I found building a server rack and assembling hot-swappable drives fascinating, I was equally intrigued by how the software side of servers operated. After configuring the hypervisor, I installed Pi-hole on a virtual machine and began using it. Since this system lacked an internet connection, I tinkered with an old laptop I had in the server room.

Although this setup was temporary and lasted only a few months, it provided me with invaluable experience in networking, virtualization, and server management. During this period, I was also enrolled in a graduate program in Information Management, which complemented my hands-on experience with relevant classroom material.

Revision #1
Created 2026-03-04 18:26:08 UTC by lumxux
Updated 2026-03-04 18:26:44 UTC by lumxux