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**IMAP REPLACE Extension**  
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Abstract

This document defines an IMAP extension which can be used to replace an existing message in a message store with a new message. Message replacement is a common operation for clients that automatically save drafts or notes as a user composes them.

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Table of Contents

- [1. Conventions Used in This Document . . . . .](#) [2](#)
- [2. Overview . . . . .](#) [2](#)
- [3. REPLACE and UID REPLACE . . . . .](#) [3](#)
  - [3.1. Advertising Support for REPLACE . . . . .](#) [3](#)
  - [3.2. REPLACE Command . . . . .](#) [3](#)
  - [3.3. UID REPLACE Command . . . . .](#) [4](#)
  - [3.4. Semantics of REPLACE and UID REPLACE . . . . .](#) [4](#)
  - [3.5. IMAP State Diagram Impacts . . . . .](#) [5](#)
- [4. Interaction with other extensions . . . . .](#) [5](#)
  - [4.1. RFC 4314, ACL . . . . .](#) [6](#)
  - [4.2. RFC 4469, CATENATE . . . . .](#) [6](#)
  - [4.3. RFC 4315, UIDPLUS . . . . .](#) [6](#)
  - [4.4. RFC 6785, IMAP Events in Sieve . . . . .](#) [6](#)
  - [4.5. RFC 7162, CONDSTORE/QRESYNC . . . . .](#) [6](#)
- [5. Formal Syntax . . . . .](#) [6](#)
- [6. Security Considerations . . . . .](#) [7](#)
- [7. IANA Considerations . . . . .](#) [7](#)
- [8. Acknowledgements . . . . .](#) [7](#)
- [9. References . . . . .](#) [7](#)
  - [9.1. Normative References . . . . .](#) [7](#)
  - [9.2. Informative References . . . . .](#) [8](#)
- [Author's Address . . . . .](#) [8](#)

**1. Conventions Used in This Document**

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)].

Formal syntax is defined by [[RFC5234](#)].

Example lines prefaced by "C:" are sent by the client and ones prefaced by "S:" by the server.

**2. Overview**

This document defines an IMAP [[RFC3501](#)] extension to facilitate replacing an existing message with a new one. This is accomplished by defining a new REPLACE command and extending the UID command to allow UID REPLACE.

Using commands from the base IMAP specification, replacement of a message involves three separate commands issued in serial fashion; APPEND, STORE, EXPUNGE. Pipelining of these three commands is not recommended since failure of any individual command should prevent subsequent commands from being executed lest the original message

Brandt

Expires October 31, 2015

[Page 2]

version be lost. The REPLACE command is intended to provide an atomic alternative to the existing non-atomic sequence.

Because of the non-atomic nature of the existing sequence, interruptions can leave messages in intermediate states which can be seen and acted upon by other clients. Such interruptions can also strand older revisions of messages, thereby forcing the user to manually clean up multiple revisions of the same message in order to avoid wasteful quota consumption. Additionally, the existing sequence can fail on APPEND due to an over-quota condition even though the subsequent STORE/EXPUNGE would free up enough space for the newly revised message. And finally, server efficiencies may be possible with a single logical message replacement operation as compared to the existing APPEND/STORE/EXPUNGE sequence.

In its simplest form, the REPLACE command is an atomic encapsulation of STORE + UID EXPUNGE + APPEND. Servers that support the REPLACE command MUST guarantee atomicity; either the specified message is completely replaced by the supplied message, or the specified message is left unmodified and no part of the supplied message data is stored. Servers supporting REPLACE also MUST NOT infer any inheritance of content, flags, or annotations from the message being replaced.

### **3. REPLACE and UID REPLACE**

#### **3.1. Advertising Support for REPLACE**

Servers that implement the REPLACE extension will return "REPLACE" as one of the supported capabilities in the CAPABILITY command response.

#### **3.2. REPLACE Command**

Arguments: message sequence number  
          mailbox name  
          OPTIONAL flag parenthesized list  
          OPTIONAL date/time string  
          message literal

Responses: no specific responses for this command

Result: OK - replace completed  
        NO - replace error; can't remove specified message  
          or can't add new message content  
        BAD - command unknown or arguments invalid



Example:

```
C: A003 REPLACE 4 Drafts (\Seen \Draft) {312}
S: + Ready for literal data
C: Date: Thu, 1 Jan 2015 00:05:00 -0500 (EST)
C: From: Fritz Schmidt <fritz.ze@example.org>
C: Subject: happy new year !!
C: To: miss.mitzy@example.org
C: Message-Id: <B238822388-0100000@example.org>
C: MIME-Version: 1.0
C: Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; CHARSET=US-ASCII
C:
C: Just saw the best fireworks show. Wish you were here.
C:
S: * 4 EXPUNGE
S: A003 OK [APPENDUID 1 2000] Replace completed
```

### **3.3. UID REPLACE Command**

This extends the first form of the UID command (see [\[RFC3501 Section 6.4.8\]](#)) to add the REPLACE command defined above as a valid argument. This form of REPLACE uses a UID rather than sequence number as its first parameter.

Example:

```
C: A004 UID REPLACE 2000 Drafts (\Seen \Draft) {350}
S: + Ready for literal data
C: Date: Thu, 1 Jan 2015 00:06:00 -0500 (EST)
C: From: Fritz Schmidt <fritz.ze@example.org>
C: Subject: happy new year !!
C: To: miss.mitzy@example.org
C: Message-Id: <B238822389-0100000@example.org>
C: MIME-Version: 1.0
C: Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; CHARSET=US-ASCII
C:
C: Just saw the best fireworks show. Wish you were here.
C: Hopefully next year you can join us.
C:
S: * 4 EXPUNGE
S: A004 OK [APPENDUID 1 2001] Replace completed
```

### **3.4. Semantics of REPLACE and UID REPLACE**

The REPLACE and UID REPLACE commands take five arguments: a message identifier, a named mailbox, an optional parenthesized flag list, an optional message date/time string, and a message literal. The message literal will be appended to the named mailbox, and the message specified by the message identifier will be removed from the

Brandt

Expires October 31, 2015

[Page 4]

selected mailbox. These operations will appear to the client as a single action. This has the same effect as the following sequence:

1. [UID] STORE +FLAGS.SILENT \DELETED
2. UID EXPUNGE
3. APPEND

In the cited sequence, the original message is removed first to avoid possible quota implications of APPENDING new data first. Additionally, the EXPUNGE portion of the sequence only applies to the specified message, not all messages flagged as \Deleted.

Although the effect of REPLACE is identical to the steps above, the semantics are not identical; similar to MOVE [[RFC6851](#)], the intermediate states produced do not occur, and the response codes are different. In particular, the response codes for EXPUNGE and APPEND will be returned while those for the STORE operation MUST NOT be generated.

When an error occurs while processing REPLACE or UID REPLACE, the server MUST NOT leave the selected mailbox in an inconsistent or modified state; any untagged EXPUNGE response MUST NOT be sent until all actions are successfully completed. Additionally, the target mailbox MUST NOT be modified until all actions are successfully completed.

Because of the similarity of REPLACE to APPEND, extensions that affect APPEND affect REPLACE in the same way. Response codes such TRYCREATE (see [[RFC3501](#)] [Section 6.3.11](#)), as well as those defined by extensions, are sent as appropriate. See [Section 4](#) for more information about how REPLACE interacts with other IMAP extensions.

### **[3.5.](#) IMAP State Diagram Impacts**

Unlike the APPEND command which is valid in the authenticated state, the REPLACE command MUST only be valid in the selected state. This difference from APPEND is necessary since REPLACE operates on message sequence numbers.

## **[4.](#) Interaction with other extensions**

This section describes how REPLACE interacts with some other IMAP extensions.





#### **[4.1.](#) [RFC 4314](#), ACL**

The ACL rights [[RFC4314](#)] required for UID REPLACE are the union of the ACL rights required for UID STORE, UID EXPUNGE, and APPEND.

#### **[4.2.](#) [RFC 4469](#), CATENATE**

Servers supporting both REPLACE and CATENATE [[RFC4469](#)] MUST support the additional append-data and resp-text-code elements defined the Formal Syntax section of [RFC4469](#) in conjunction with the REPLACE command.

#### **[4.3.](#) [RFC 4315](#), UIDPLUS**

Servers supporting both REPLACE and UIDPLUS [[RFC4315](#)] MUST send APPENDUID in response to a UID REPLACE command. The only exceptions to this are the ones outlined for APPEND in [RFC4315 section 3](#).

#### **[4.4.](#) [RFC 6785](#), IMAP Events in Sieve**

REPLACE applies to IMAP events in Sieve [[RFC6785](#)] in the same way that APPEND does. Therefore, REPLACE can cause a Sieve script to be invoked with the `imap.cause` set to "APPEND". Because the intermediate state of STORE +FLAGS.SILENT \DELETED is not exposed by REPLACE, no action will be taken that results in a `imap.cause` of FLAG.

#### **[4.5.](#) [RFC 7162](#), CONDSTORE/QRESYNC**

Servers implementing both REPLACE and CONDSTORE/QRESYNC [[RFC7162](#)] MUST treat the message being replaced as if it were being removed with a UID EXPUNGE command. Sections [3.2.9](#) and [3.2.10](#) of [RFC 7162](#) are particularly relevant for this condition.

### **5. Formal Syntax**

The following syntax specification uses the Augmented Backus-Naur Form (ABNF) notation as specified in [[RFC5234](#)]. [[RFC3501](#)] defines the non-terminals "capability", "command-select", "mailbox", and "sequence-number". [[RFC4466](#)] defines the non-terminal "append-message".

Except as noted otherwise, all alphabetic characters are case-insensitive. The use of upper or lower case characters to define token strings is for editorial clarity only. Implementations MUST accept these strings in a case-insensitive fashion.



```
capability      =/ "REPLACE"

command-select =/ replace
replace        = "REPLACE" SP seq-number SP mailbox append-message
uid           = "UID" SP (copy / fetch/ search / store / move /
                        replace)
```

## **6. Security Considerations**

This document is believed to add no security problems beyond those that may already exist with the base IMAP specification.

## **7. IANA Considerations**

The IANA is requested to add REPLACE to the "IMAP 4 Capabilities" registry, <http://www.iana.org/assignments/imap4-capabilities>.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

## **9. References**

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[RFC7162] Melnikov, A. and D. Cridland, "IMAP Extensions: Quick Flag Changes Resynchronization (CONDSTORE) and Quick Mailbox Resynchronization (QRESYNC)", [RFC 7162](#), May 2014.

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