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DNS Scoped Data Through '_Underscore' Naming of Attribute Leaves
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Abstract

Formally, any DNS resource record may occur for any domain name. However some services have defined an operational convention, which applies to DNS leaf nodes that are under a DNS branch having one or more reserved node names, each beginning with an underscore. The underscore naming construct defines a semantic scope for DNS record types that are associated with the parent domain, above the underscored branch. This specification explores the nature of this DNS usage and defines the "DNS Global Underscore Scoped Entry Registry" with IANA. The purpose of the Underscore registry is to avoid collisions resulting from the use of the same underscore-based name, for different services.

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[1.](#) Introduction

The core Domain Name System (DNS) technical specifications assign no semantics to domain names or their parts, and no constraints upon which resource record (RR) types are permitted to be stored under particular names [[RFC1035](#)], [[RFC2181](#)]. Over time, some leaf node names, such as "www" and "ftp" have come to imply support for particular services, but this is a matter of operational convention, rather than defined protocol semantics. This freedom in the basic technology has permitted a wide range of administrative and semantic policies to be used -- in parallel. DNS data semantics have been limited to the specification of particular resource record types, on the expectation that new ones would be added as needed. Unfortunately, the addition of new resource record types has proven extremely challenging, over the life of the DNS, with significant adoption and use barriers.

[1.1.](#) _Underscore Scoping

As an alternative to defining a new RR type, some DNS service enhancements call for using an existing resource record type, but specify a restricted scope for its occurrence. Scope is meant as a static property, not one dependent on the nature of the query. It is an artifact of the DNS name. That scope is a leaf node, within which

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the uses of specific resource record sets can be formally defined and constrained. The leaf occurs in a branch having a distinguished naming convention: At the top of the branch -- beneath the parent domain name to which the scope applies -- one or more reserved DNS node names begin with an underscore ("_"). Because the DNS rules for a "host" (host name) are not allowed to use the underscore character, this distinguishes the underscore name from all legal host names [RFC952]. Effectively, this convention for leaf node naming creates a space for the listing of 'attributes' -- in the form of resource record types -- that are associated with the parent domain, above the underscored sub-branch.

The scoping feature is particularly useful when generalized resource record types are used -- notably "TXT", "SRV", and "URI" [RFC1035], [RFC2782], [RFC6335], [RFC7553]. It provides efficient separation of one use of them from others. Absent this separation, an undifferentiated mass of these "RRsets" is returned to the DNS client, which then must parse through the internals of the records in the hope of finding ones that are relevant. Worse, in some cases the results are ambiguous because a record type might not adequately self-identify. With underscore-based scoping, only the relevant "RRsets"s are returned.

A simple example is DKIM [RFC6376], which uses "_domainkeys" for defining a place to hold a "TXT" record containing signing information for the parent domain.

This specification formally defines how underscore labels are used as "attribute" enhancements for their parent domain names. For example, domain name "_domainkey.example." acts as attribute of parent domain name "example." To avoid collisions resulting from the use of the same underscore-based labels for different applications using the same resource record type, this document establishes DNS Underscore Global Scoped Entry IANA Registry for the highest-level reserved names that begin with _underscore; _underscore-based names that are farther down the hierarchy are handled within the scope of the highest-level _underscore name.

Discussion Venue: Discussion about this draft should be directed to the dnsop@ietf.org [1] mailing list.

NOTE TO RFC EDITOR: Please remove "Discussion Venue" paragraph prior to publication.

1.2. Scaling Benefits

Some resource record types are used in a fashion that can create scaling problems, if an entire RRset associated with a domain name is aggregated in the leaf node for that name. An increasingly-popular approach, with excellent scaling properties, places the RRset under a node having an underscore-based name, at a defined place in the DNS tree under the 'parent' name. This constrains the use of particular "RR" types associated with that parent name. A direct lookup to the subordinate leaf node produces only the desired record types, at no greater cost than a typical DNS lookup.

The definition of a underscore global registry, provided in this specification, primarily attends to the top-most names used for scoping an RR type; that is the _underscore "global" names.

2. DNS Underscore Scoped Entry Registries Function

A global registry for DNS nodes names that begin with an _underscore is defined here.

The 'global' (right-most) node name that uses an _underscore prefix MUST be entered into this registry.

The names define scope of use for specific resource record types, which are associated with the domain name that is the "parent" to the branch defined by the _underscore naming.

A given name defines a specific, constrained context for one or more RR types, in which use of such record types MUST conform to the defined constraints. Within this scope, other RRsets that are not specified MAY be used.

The purpose of the Underscore Global Registry is to avoid collisions resulting from the use of the same _underscore-based name, for different applications.

The DNS Global Underscore Registry MUST have entries that are unique with respect to the combination of the listed resource record type and the listed, global underscore node name (RR Type, _Node Name).

Structurally, the registry is defined as a single, flat table of RR types, under node names beginning with _underscore. In some cases, such as for use of an "SRV" record, the full scoping name might be multi-part, as a sequence of underscore names. Semantically, that sequence represents a hierarchical model and it is theoretically reasonable to allow re-use of a subordinate underscore name in

different underscore context; that is, a subordinate name is meaningful only within the scope of the right-most (top-level) underscore name. Therefore they are ignored by this DNS Underscore Global Scoped Entry Registry. This registry is for the definition of highest-level -- ie, global -- underscore node name used.

```

+-----+
|                                     NAME |
+-----+
|               _service1 |
|      ._protoB._service2 |
|      _protoB._service3 |
|      _protoC._service3 |
|    _useX._protoD._service4 |
| _protoE._region._authority |
+-----+

```

Example of Underscore Names

Only the right-most _underscore names are registered in the IANA Underscore Global table.

Definition and registration of the subordinate underscore node names is the responsibility of the specification that creates the highest-level (right-most) global registry entry.

That is, if a scheme using a global underscore node name also has one or more subordinate levels of underscore node naming, the namespaces from which names for those lower levels is chosen is controlled by the parent underscore node name. Each globally-registered underscore name owns a distinct, subordinate name space.

2.1. DNS Underscore Global Scoped Entry Registry Definition

A registry entry contains:

RR Type: Lists an RR type that is defined for use within this scope.

_Node Name: Specifies a single _underscore name that defines a reserved name; this name is the "global" entry name for the scoped resource record types that are associated with that name

References: Lists specification that defines a record type and its use under this Name. The organization producing the

specification retains control over the registry entry for the `_Node Name`.

Each RR type that is to be used MUST have a separate registry entry.

3. IANA Considerations

Per [\[RFC8126\]](#), IANA is requested to establish the:

DNS Underscore Global Scoped Entry Registry

This section describes actions requested of IANA. The guidance in [\[IANA\]](#) is used.

3.1. DNS Underscore Global Scoped Entry Registry

The DNS Global Underscore Scoped Entry Registry is for DNS node names that begin with the underscore character (`_`) and are the right-most occurrence of any names in a domain name sequence having that form; that is they are the "top" of a DNS branch and are shown as the right-most `_underscore` name -- under a "parent" domain name.

- o This registry is to operate under the IANA rules for "Expert Review" registration; see [Section 3.2](#).
- o The contents of each entry in the Global registry are defined in [Section 2.1](#).
- o The table is to be maintained with entries sorted by the first column (RR Type) and within that the second column (`_Node Name`).
- o The required Reference for an entry MUST have a stable resolution to the organization controlling that registry entry

Initial entries in the registry are:

RR Type	_NODE NAME	REFERENCE
OPENPGPKEY	_openpgpkey	[RFC7929]
SMIMEA	_smimecert	[RFC8162]
SRV	_dccp	[RFC2782]
SRV	_sctp	[RFC2782]
SRV	_tcp	[RFC2782]
SRV	_udp	[RFC2782]
TLSA	_sctp	[RFC6698]
TLSA	_tcp	[RFC6698]
TLSA	_udp	[RFC6698]
TXT	_acme-challenge	[ACME]
TXT	_domainkey	[RFC6376]
TXT	_dmarc	[RFC7489]
TXT	_spf	[RFC7208]
TXT	_vouch	[RFC5518]
URI	_dccp	[RFC7553]
URI	_sctp	[RFC7553]
URI	_tcp	[RFC7553]
URI	_udp	[RFC7553]

Table 1: Underscore Global Registry (initial entries)

3.2. Guidance for Expert Review

This section provides guidance for expert review of registration requests in the of DNS Underscore Global Scoped Entry Registry.

This review is solely to determine adequacy of a requested entry in this Registry, and does not include review of other aspects of the document specifying that entry. For example such a document might also contain a definition of the resource record type that is referenced by the requested entry. Any required review of that definition is separate from the expert review required here.

The review is for the purposes of ensuring that:

- o The details for creating the registry entry are sufficiently clear, precise and complete
- o The combination of the _underscore name, under which the listed resource record type is used, and the resource record type, is unique in the table

For the purposes of this Expert Review, other matters of the specification's technical quality, adequacy or the like are outside of scope.

4. Security Considerations

This memo raises no security issues.

5. References

5.1. Normative References

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[5.2. URIs](#)

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[Appendix A. Acknowledgements](#)

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