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Mark Smith, Editor  
Netscape Communications Corp.  
Tim Howes  
Opsware, Inc.

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**LDAP: Uniform Resource Locator**  
<[draft-ietf-ldapbis-url-04.txt](#)>

## **1. Status of this Memo**

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Discussion of this document should take place on the LDAP (v3) Revision (ldapbis) Working Group mailing list <ietf-ldapbis@openldap.org>.

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## **2. Abstract**

This document describes a format for an LDAP Uniform Resource Locator (URL). An LDAP URL describes an LDAP search operation that is used to retrieve information from an LDAP directory, or, in the context of an LDAPv3 referral or reference, an LDAP URL describes a service where an LDAP operation may be progressed.

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### **4. Introduction**

LDAP is the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol, defined in [[Protocol](#)]. This document specifies the LDAP URL format for version 3 of LDAP and clarifies how LDAP URLs are resolved. This document also defines an extension mechanism for LDAP URLs, so that future documents can extend their functionality, for example, to provide access to new LDAPv3 extensions as they are defined. Note: not all of the parameters of the LDAP search operation described in [[Protocol](#)] can be expressed using the format defined in this document.

This document is an integral part of the LDAP Technical Specification [[Roadmap](#)].

This document replaces [RFC 2255](#). See [Appendix A](#) for a list of changes relative to [RFC 2255](#).

The key words "MUST", "MAY", and "SHOULD" used in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)].

### **5. URL Definition**

An LDAP URL begins with the protocol prefix "ldap" and is defined by



the following grammar, following the ABNF notation defined in [\[RFC2234\]](#).

```

ldapurl      = scheme COLON SLASH SLASH [hostport] [SLASH dn
               [QUESTION [attributes] [QUESTION [scope]
               [QUESTION [filter] [QUESTION extensions]]]]]
scheme       = "ldap"
hostport     = <hostport from Section 3.2.2 of \[RFC2396\]>
               ; as updated by \[RFC2732\] to allow IPv6 literal
addresses
dn           = <distinguishedName from Section 3 of \[LDAPDN\]>
               ; see the "Escaping Using the % Method" section below.
attributes   = attrdesc *(COMMA attrdesc)
attrdesc     = <AttributeDescription from Section 4.1.4 of \[Protocol\]>
               / ASTERISK
               ; see the "Escaping Using the % Method" section below.
scope        = "base" / "one" / "sub"
filter       = <filter from Section 4 of \[Filters\]>
               ; see the "Escaping Using the % Method" section below.
extensions   = extension *(COMMA extension)
extension     = [EXCLAMATION] extype [EQUALS exvalue]
extype        = oid / oiddescr
exvalue       = <LDAPString from section 4.1.2 of \[Protocol\]>
               ; see the "Escaping Using the % Method" section below.
oid           = <LDAPOID from section 4.1.2 of \[Protocol\]>
oiddescr      = <name from section 3.3 of \[RFC3383\]>

EXCLAMATION  = %x21 ; exclamation mark ("!")
ASTERISK     = %x2A ; asterisk ("*")
COLON        = %x3A ; colon (":")
QUESTION     = %x3F ; question mark ("?")
SLASH        = %x5C; forward slash ("/")

```

The "ldap" prefix indicates an entry or entries residing in the LDAP server running on the given hostname at the given portnumber. Note that the hostport may contain literal IPv6 addresses as specified in [\[RFC2732\]](#).

The dn is an LDAP Distinguished Name using the string format described in [\[LDAPDN\]](#). It identifies the base object of the LDAP search or the target of a non-search operation.

The attributes construct is used to indicate which attributes should be returned from the entry or entries. Individual attrdesc names are as defined for AttributeDescription in [\[Protocol\]](#).

The scope construct is used to specify the scope of the search to

perform in the given LDAP server. The allowable scopes are "base"

for a base object search, "one" for a one-level search, or "sub" for a subtree search.

The filter is used to specify the search filter to apply to entries within the specified scope during the search. It has the format specified in [\[Filters\]](#).

The extensions construct provides the LDAP URL with an extensibility mechanism, allowing the capabilities of the URL to be extended in the future. Extensions are a simple comma-separated list of type=value pairs, where the =value portion MAY be omitted for options not requiring it. Each type=value pair is a separate extension. These LDAP URL extensions are not necessarily related to any of the LDAPv3 extension mechanisms. Extensions may be supported or unsupported by the client resolving the URL. An extension prefixed with a '!' character (ASCII 33) is critical. An extension not prefixed with a '!' character is non-critical.

If an extension is supported by the client, the client MUST obey the extension if the extension is critical. The client SHOULD obey supported extensions that are non-critical.

If an extension is unsupported by the client, the client MUST NOT process the URL if the extension is critical. If an unsupported extension is non-critical, the client MUST ignore the extension.

If a critical extension cannot be processed successfully by the client, the client MUST NOT process the URL. If a non-critical extension cannot be processed successfully by the client, the client SHOULD ignore the extension.

The extension type (extype) MAY be specified using the oid form (e.g., 1.2.3.4) or the oiddesc form (e.g., myLDAPURLExtension). Use of the oiddesc form SHOULD be restricted to registered object identifier descriptive names. See [\[RFC3383\]](#) for registration details and usage guidelines for descriptive names.

No LDAP URL extensions are defined in this document. Other documents or a future version of this document MAY define one or more extensions.

### **[5.1. Escaping Using the % Method](#)**

A generated LDAP URL MUST consist only of the restricted set of characters included in the uric production that is defined in [section 2 of \[RFC2396\]](#). Implementations SHOULD accept other valid UTF-8 strings [\[UTF-8\]](#) as input. An octet MUST be escaped using the % method described in [section 2.4 of \[RFC2396\]](#) in any of these



situations:

The octet is not in the reserved set defined in [section 2.2 of \[RFC2396\]](#) or in the unreserved set defined in [section 2.3 of \[RFC2396\]](#).

It is the single Reserved character '?' and occurs inside a dn, filter, or other element of an LDAP URL.

It is a comma character ',' that occurs inside an extension value.

## 6. Defaults for Fields of the LDAP URL

Some fields of the LDAP URL are optional, as described above. In the absence of any other specification, the following general defaults SHOULD be used when a field is absent. Note: other documents MAY specify different defaulting rules; for example, section 4.1.11 of [\[Protocol\]](#) specifies a different rule for determining the correct DN to use when it is absent in an LDAP URL that is returned as a referral.

hostport

The default LDAP port is TCP port 389. If no hostport is given, the client must have some apriori knowledge of an appropriate LDAP server to contact.

dn

If no dn is given, the default is the zero-length DN, "".

attributes

If the attributes part is omitted, all user attributes of the entry or entries should be requested (e.g., by setting the attributes field AttributeDescriptionList in the LDAP search request to a NULL list, or (in LDAPv3) by requesting the special attribute name "\*").

scope

If scope is omitted, a scope of "base" is assumed.

filter

If filter is omitted, a filter of "(objectClass=\*)" is assumed.

extensions

If extensions is omitted, no extensions are assumed.



## 7. Examples

The following are some example LDAP URLs using the format defined above. The first example is an LDAP URL referring to the University of Michigan entry, available from an LDAP server of the client's choosing:

```
ldap:///o=University%20of%20Michigan,c=US
```

The next example is an LDAP URL referring to the University of Michigan entry in a particular ldap server:

```
ldap://ldap1.example.net/o=University%20of%20Michigan,c=US
```

Both of these URLs correspond to a base object search of the "o=University of Michigan,c=US" entry using a filter of "(objectclass=\*)", requesting all attributes.

The next example is an LDAP URL referring to only the postalAddress attribute of the University of Michigan entry:

```
ldap://ldap1.example.net/o=University%20of%20Michigan,  
c=US?postalAddress
```

The corresponding LDAP search operation is the same as in the previous example, except that only the postalAddress attribute is requested.

The next example is an LDAP URL referring to the set of entries found by querying the given LDAP server on port 6666 and doing a subtree search of the University of Michigan for any entry with a common name of "Babs Jensen", retrieving all attributes:

```
ldap://ldap1.example.net:6666/o=University%20of%20Michigan,  
c=US??sub?(cn=Babs%20Jensen)
```

The next example is an LDAP URL referring to all children of the c=GB entry:

```
ldap://ldap1.example.com/c=GB?objectClass?one
```

The objectClass attribute is requested to be returned along with the entries, and the default filter of "(objectclass=\*)" is used.

The next example is an LDAP URL to retrieve the mail attribute for the LDAP entry named "o=Question?,c=US" is given below, illustrating the use of the escaping mechanism on the reserved character '?'.  
The use of the escaping mechanism on the reserved character '?'.



```
ldap://ldap2.example.com/o=Question%3f,c=US?mail
```

The next example illustrates the interaction between the LDAP string representation of filters quoting mechanism and URL quoting mechanisms.

```
ldap://ldap3.example.com/o=Babsco,c=US??? (four-octet=%5c00%5c00%5c00%5c04)
```

IP The filter in this example uses the LDAP escaping mechanism of \ to encode three zero or null bytes in the value. In LDAP, the filter would be written as (four-octet=\00\00\00\04). Because the \ character must be escaped in a URL, the \'s are escaped as %5c in the URL encoding.

The next example illustrates the interaction between the LDAP string representation of DNS quoting mechanism and URL quoting mechanisms.

```
ldap://ldap.example.com/o=An%20Example%5c2c%20Inc.,c=US
```

The DN encoded in the above URL is:

```
o=An Example\2c Inc.,c=US
```

That is, the left-most RDN value is:

```
An Example, Inc.
```

The following three URLs that are equivalent, assuming that the defaulting rules specified in [section 4](#) of this document are used:

```
ldap://ldap.example.net
ldap://ldap.example.net/
ldap://ldap.example.net/?
```

These three URLs all point to the root DSE on the ldap.example.net server.

The final two examples show use of a hypothetical, experimental bind name extension (the value associated with the extension is an LDAP DN).

```
ldap:///??sub??e-bindname=cn=Manager%2cdc=example%2cdc=com
ldap:///??sub?!e-bindname=cn=Manager%2cdc=example%2cdc=com
```

The two URLs are the same, except that the second one marks the e-bindname extension as critical. Notice the use of the % encoding method to encode the commas within the distinguished name value in the e-bindname extension.



## **8. Security Considerations**

General URL security considerations discussed in [[RFC2396](#)] are relevant for LDAP URLs.

The use of security mechanisms when processing LDAP URLs requires particular care, since clients may encounter many different servers via URLs, and since URLs are likely to be processed automatically, without user intervention. A client SHOULD have a user-configurable policy about which servers to connect to using which security mechanisms, and SHOULD NOT make connections that are inconsistent with this policy. If a client chooses to reuse an existing connection when resolving one or more LDAP URL, it MUST ensure that the connection is compatible with the URL and that no security policies are violated.

Sending authentication information, no matter the mechanism, may violate a user's privacy requirements. In the absence of specific policy permitting authentication information to be sent to a server, a client should use an anonymous connection. (Note that clients conforming to previous LDAP URL specifications, where all connections are anonymous and unprotected, are consistent with this specification; they simply have the default security policy.) Simply opening a connection to another server may violate some users' privacy requirements, so clients should provide the user with a way to control URL processing.

Some authentication methods, in particular reusable passwords sent to the server, may reveal easily-abused information to the remote server or to eavesdroppers in transit, and should not be used in URL processing unless explicitly permitted by policy. Confirmation by the human user of the use of authentication information is appropriate in many circumstances. Use of strong authentication methods that do not reveal sensitive information is much preferred. If the URL represents a referral for an update operation, strong authentication methods SHOULD be used. Please refer to the Security Considerations section of [[AuthMeth](#)] for more information.

The LDAP URL format allows the specification of an arbitrary LDAP search operation to be performed when evaluating the LDAP URL. Following an LDAP URL may cause unexpected results, for example, the retrieval of large amounts of data, the initiation of a long-lived search, etc. The security implications of resolving an LDAP URL are the same as those of resolving an LDAP search query.

## **9. Normative References**

[LDAPDN] Zeilenga, K. (editor), "LDAP: String Representation of



Distinguished Names", [draft-ietf-ldapbis-dn-xx.txt](#), a work in progress.

[Filters] Smith, M. and Howes, T., "LDAP: String Representation of Search Filters", [draft-ietf-ldapbis-filter-xx.txt](#), a work in progress.

[RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key Words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [RFC 2119](#), [BCP 14](#), March 1997.

[Protocol] Sermersheim, J. (editor), "LDAP: The Protocol", [draft-ietf-ldapbis-protocol-xx.txt](#), a work in progress.

[RFC2234] Crocker, D., Overell, P., "Augmented BNF for Syntax Specifications: ABNF", [RFC 2234](#), November 1997.

[RFC2396] Berners-Lee, T., Fielding, R., and Masinter, L., "Uniform Resource Identifiers (URI): Generic Syntax", [RFC 2396](#), August 1998.

[RFC2732] Hinden, R., Carpenter, B., Masinter, L., "Format for Literal IPv6 Addresses in URL's", [RFC 2732](#), December 1999.

[RFC3383] Zeilenga, K., "Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) Considerations for the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP)", [RFC 3383](#), September 2002.

[AuthMeth] Harrison, R. (editor), "LDAP: Authentication Methods", [draft-ietf-ldapbis-authmeth-xx.txt](#), a work in progress. a work in progress.

[Roadmap] K. Zeilenga (editor), "LDAP: Technical Specification Road Map", [draft-ietf-ldapbis-roadmap-xx.txt](#), a work in progress.

[UTF-8] Yergeau, F., "UTF-8, a transformation format of ISO 10646", [draft-yergeau-rfc2279bis-xx.txt](#), a work in progress.

## **10. Informative References**

None.

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## **[12.](#) Acknowledgements**

The LDAP URL format was originally defined at the University of Michigan. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. NCR-9416667. The support of both the University of Michigan and the National Science Foundation is gratefully acknowledged.

This document is an update to [RFC 2255](#) by Tim Howes and Mark Smith. Changes included in this revised specification are based upon discussions among the authors, discussions within the LDAP (v3) Revision Working Group (ldapbis), and discussions within other IETF Working Groups. The contributions of individuals in these working groups is gratefully acknowledged. Several people in particular have made valuable comments on this document; RL "Bob" Morgan, Mark Wahl, Kurt Zeilenga, Jim Sermersheim, and Hallvard Furuseth deserve special thanks for their contributions.

## **[13.](#) Authors' Address**

Mark Smith, Editor  
Netscape Communications Corp.  
360 W. Caribbean Drive  
Sunnyvale, CA 94089  
USA  
+1 650 937-3477  
MarkCSmithWork@aol.com

Tim Howes  
Opware, Inc.  
599 N. Mathilda Ave.  
Sunnyvale, CA 94085  
USA  
+1 408 744-7509



howes@opsware.com

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#### **15. Appendix A: Changes Since [RFC 2255](#)**

##### **15.1. Technical Changes**

The following technical changes were made to the contents of the "URL Definition" section:

Revised all of the ABNF to use common productions from [Models].

Added note and references to [[RFC2732](#)] to allow literal IPv6 addresses inside the hostport portion of the URL.

Added missing ASTERISK as an alternative for the attrdesc part of the URL. It is believed that existing implementations of [RFC 2255](#) already support this.

Added angle brackets around free-form prose in the "dn", "hostport", "attrdesc", "filter", and "exvalue" rules.



Changed the ABNF for `ldapurl` to group the `dn` component with the preceding slash.

Changed the `extype` rule to be an LDAPOID from [[Protocol](#)] or an OID description from [[RFC3383](#)].

Changed the text about extension types so it references [[RFC3383](#)]. Reordered rules to more closely follow the order the elements appear in the URL.

"Bindname Extension": removed due to lack of known implementations.

## **[15.2](#). Editorial Changes**

Changed document title to include "LDAP:" prefix.

IESG Note: removed note about lack of satisfactory mandatory authentication mechanisms.

"Status of this Memo" section: updated boilerplate to match current I-D guidelines.

"Abstract" section: separated from introductory material.

"Table of Contents" section: added.

"Introduction" section: new section; separated from the Abstract. Changed the text indicate that [RFC 2255](#) is replaced by this document (instead of [RFC 1959](#)). Added text to indicate that LDAP URLs are used for references and referrals. Fixed typo (replaced the nonsense phrase "to perform to retrieve" with "used to retrieve"). Added a note to let the reader know that not all of the parameters of the LDAP search operation described in [[Protocol](#)] can be expressed using this format.

"URL Definition" section: removed second copy of `ldapurl` grammar and following two paragraphs (editorial error in [RFC 2255](#)). Fixed line break within `'!'` sequence. Reworded last paragraph to clarify which characters must be URL escaped. Added text to indicate that LDAP URLs are used for references and referrals. Added text that refers to the ABNF from [RFC 2234](#).

"Defaults for Fields of the LDAP URL" section: added; formed by moving text about defaults out of the "URL Definition" section.

"URL Processing" section: clarified that connections MAY be reused only if the open connection is compatible with the URL. Added text



to indicate that use of security services is encouraged and that they SHOULD be used when updates are involved. Removed "dn" from discussion of authentication methods. Added note that the client MAY interrogate the server to determine the most appropriate method.

"Examples" section: Modified examples to use example.com and example.net hostnames. Added missing '?' to the LDAP URL example whose filter contains three null bytes. Removed space after one comma within a DN. Revised the bindname example to use e-bindname. Changed the name of an attribute used in one example from "int" to "four-octet" to avoid potential confusion. Added an example that demonstrates the interaction between DN escaping and URL escaping. Added some examples to show URL equivalence with respect to the dn portion of the URL.

"Security Considerations" section: Added a note about connection reuse. Added a note about using strong authentication methods for updates. Added a reference to [RFC 2829](#). Added note that simply opening a connection may violate some users' privacy requirements.

"Acknowledgements" section: added statement about this being an update to [RFC 2255](#). Added Kurt Zeilenga, Jim Sermersheim, and Hallvard Furuseth.

"Normative References" section: renamed from "References" per new RFC guidelines. Changed from [1] style to [[Protocol](#)] style throughout the document. Added references to RFCs 2234, 2829, and 3383. Updated [RFC 1738](#) references to the appropriate sections within [RFC 2396](#). Updated the references to refer to LDAPbis WG documents. Removed the reference to the LDAP Attribute Syntaxes document and added a reference to the Roadmap document.

"Informative References" section: added for clarity.

Header and "Authors' Address" sections: added "editor" next to Mark Smith's name. Updated affiliation and contact information.

Copyright: updated the year.

## **[16. Appendix B: Changes Since Previous Document Revision](#)**

This appendix lists all changes relative to the previously published revision, [draft-ietf-ldapbis-url-03.txt](#). Note that when appropriate these changes are also included in [Appendix A](#), but are also included here for the benefit of the people who have already reviewed [draft-ietf-ldapbis-url-03.txt](#). This section will be removed before this document is published as an RFC.



### **16.1. Technical Changes**

None.

### **16.2. Editorial Changes**

"URL Definition" section: added comments in the ABNF to point the reader to the "Escaping Using the % Method" section, which was changed into a section of its own to highlight the importance of escaping the URL components correctly.

"Examples" section: changed the name of an attribute used in one example from "int" to "four-octet" to avoid potential confusion.

Replaced all occurrences of "asterix" with the correctly spelled "asterisk."

"Normative References" section: changed UTF-8 reference to point to the UTF-8 Internet Draft; replace [LDAPIANA] Internet Draft reference with a reference to [RFC 3383](#).

"Intellectual Property Rights" section: added.

Author's Addresses section: New email address for Mark Smith.

"Full Copyright Statement" section: updated text to match latest IETF guidelines.

This Internet Draft expires on 25 April 2004.

