

LDAP in a few words

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Introduction

LDAP is not a new technology. It has been around since mid 1990, as a way to mitigate the complexity of the **X.500** based servers access. It's name is an acronym for **L**ightweight **D**irectory **A**ccess **P**rotocol. Soon after the first standard has been issued, the first full **LDAP** server was written (ie, X.500 was pushed out of the equation).

We will now use the term **LDAP** and **LDAP** server for respectively the protocole and the server.

Features

A **LDAP** server provides access to entries, stored in a backend. It offers an interrogation mechanism allowing fast retrieval of entries. The data structure is hierarchical, and we use a schema to manage the content of entries, plus the organisation of data.

A **LDAP** client first has to connect to the server, and disconnect at the end. Some operations can be done on data, searches, modification and deletion, among a few others.

LDAP servers are extensible, but they all use a common protocol which makes it easy for users to request them. This API is an exemple of what **LDAP** is very good at : access data in a fast way, across servers.

Characteristics

LDAP servers are fast for retrievals : they have been designed for this purpose. On the other hand, modifications can be costly. This has to be understood when writing an application using a **LDAP** server as a backend.

Each entry is identified by it's position in the hierarchy, and we use what is called a **Distinguished Name** (or **Dn**) to describe this position in the tree. The base is also named the **DIT**, or **D**irectory **I**nformation **T**ree.

Programming

Nowadays, **LDAP** is a part of the **IT** and it's difficult to avoid having to deal with it. **LDAP** servers are used to manage authentication, mainly, but also authorization, and more. It's very likely that you will have to write some code to access such a **LDAP** server, and the existing **API** are a bit cumbersome. This new **LDAP API** has been defined to facilitate this kind of tasks.

Going further

This was a very short introduction, you can find more literature about **LDAP** on the web : [Wikipedia](#) gives you a good starting point with many valid pointers.