XEP-0185: Dialback Key Generation and Validation

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2007-02-15  
Version 1.0

<table>
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<th>Type</th>
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</table>

This document provides a recommended method for generating and validating the keys used in the XMPP server dialback protocol.
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1 Introduction

RFC 3920 \(^1\) does not specify in detail a recommended algorithm for generating the keys used in the server dialback protocol. This document provides such a recommendation as an aid to implementors of XMPP servers. This document is not meant to supersede any text in RFC 3920; however, the recommendations in this document have been incorporated into Server Dialback (XEP-0220) \(^2\).

2 Recommended Algorithm

The process for generating and validating a dialback key SHOULD take into account the following four inputs:

- the hostname of the Originating Server
- the hostname of the Receiving Server
- the Stream ID generated by the Receiving Server
- a secret known by the Authoritative Server’s network

In particular, the following algorithm is RECOMMENDED:

```
key = HMAC-SHA256
    (    
        SHA256(Secret), 
        
        Receiving Server, ',
        Originating Server, '
        Stream ID
    )
```

Note the following:

1. The resulting dialback key is a Keyed-Hash Message Authentication Code (see HMAC \(^3\)) generated using the SHA256 hashing algorithm (see SHA \(^4\)).

2. The Secret is used as a "key" within the HMAC generation process; because HMAC recom-
commends that the length of the HMAC key should be at least half the size of the hash
function output, the Secret SHOULD be hashed via SHA256 prior to use in the in HMAC
generation process.

3. The Secret MUST either be set up in a configuration option for each host or process, or
generated as a random string when starting the XMPP server. Creation of the Secret
MUST NOT require communication between the Originating Server, the Authoritative
Server, and optionally a third party (such as a database).

4. The output of the SHA256 hashing algorithm MUST be provided in the hexadecimal rep-
resentation; this helps to avoid encoding problems.

5. The hostname of the Receiving Server, the hostname of the Originating Server, and the
Stream ID SHOULD be concatenated with a Unicode space character (U+0020) as the de-
limiter; this helps to avoid ambiguity in concatenation. 5

3 Example

This document closely follows the description of the dialback protocol in RFC 3920 and
XEP-0220, but omits steps that are not important for the generation and validation of the
dialback keys. For ease of comparison the numbering of the steps is the same as in section 8.3
of RFC 3920 and Appendix C.3 of XEP-0220. Any line breaks in the examples are included for
the purpose of readability only.

The following data values are used in the examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Originating Server</th>
<th>example.org</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative Server</td>
<td>example.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Server</td>
<td>xmpp.example.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret</td>
<td>s3cr3tf0rd14lb4ck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stream ID</td>
<td>D60000229f</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Receiving Server sends a stream header back to the Originating Server, including a unique
ID for this interaction:

```
<stream:stream
 xmlns:stream='http://etherx.jabber.org/streams'
 xmlns='jabber:server'
 xmlns:db='jabber:server:dialback'
```

3 For example, the string "example.inform.example.org" could be construed as a concatenation of "example.info" and "rm.example.org" or of "example.in" and "form.example.org".
The Originating Server now generates a dialback key to be sent to the Receiving Server:

```plaintext
key = HMAC-SHA256(
    SHA256('secret'),
    {'Receiving server', 'Originating server', Stream ID}
) = HMAC-SHA256(
    SHA256('s3cr3tf0rd14lb4ck'),
    {'xmpp.example.com', 'example.org', 'D60000229F'}
) = HMAC-SHA256(
    a7136eb1f46c9ef18c5e78c36ca257067c69b3d518285f0b428a96c33beae9acc5b9c393321e370e6,
    'xmpp.example.com_example.org_D60000229F'
) = '37c69b1cf07a3f67c04a5ef5902fa5114f2c76fe4a2686482ba5b89323075643'
```

4. The Originating Server sends the generated dialback key to the Receiving Server:

```xml
<db:result
    to='xmpp.example.com'
    from='example.org'
    id='D60000229F'>
    37c69b1cf07a3f67c04a5ef5902fa5114f2c76fe4a2686482ba5b89323075643
</db:result>
```

8. The Receiving Server sends the Authoritative Server a request for verification of the key:

```xml
<db:verify
    to='example.org'
    from='xmpp.example.com'
    id='D60000229F'>
    37c69b1cf07a3f67c04a5ef5902fa5114f2c76fe4a2686482ba5b89323075643
</db:verify>
```

The Authoritative Server calculates the valid key for this verify request, using data supplied in the packet and the secret shared with the Originating Server.

```plaintext
key = HMAC-SHA256(
    SHA256('secret'),
    {'Receiving server', 'Originating server', Stream ID}
) = HMAC-SHA256(
    SHA256('s3cr3tf0rd14lb4ck'),
    {'xmpp.example.com', 'example.org', 'D60000229F'}
) = HMAC-SHA256(
    a7136eb1f46c9ef18c5e78c36ca257067c69b3d518285f0b428a96c33beae9acc5b9c393321e370e6,
    'xmpp.example.com_example.org_D60000229F'
) = '37c69b1cf07a3f67c04a5ef5902fa5114f2c76fe4a2686482ba5b89323075643'
```
SHA256(secret),
( Receiving Server, 'x', Authoritative Server, 'x',
Stream ID )

= HMAC-SHA256(
SHA256('s3cr3tf0rd14lb4ck'),
( 'xmpp.example.com', 'x', 'example.org', 'x', 'D60000229F' )
)

= HMAC-SHA256(
'a7136eb1f46c9ef18c5e78c36ca257067c69b3d518285f0b18a96c33beae9a823a81afeb3'
,
'xmpp.example.com_example.org_D60000229F'
)

= '37c69b1cf07a3f67c04a5ef5902fa5114f2c76fe4a2686482ba589323075643'

9. The Authoritative Server compares this value to the key contained in the verification requests and informs the Originating Server of the result, in our example a success:

<db:verify
to='xmpp.example.com'
from='example.org'
id='D60000229F'
type='valid'/>
6 XMPP Registrar Considerations

This document requires no interaction with the XMPP Registrar.

7 Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ian Paterson and Matthias Wimmer for their feedback.