

Introduction to Active Directory Services

The Active Directory® directory service can be installed on servers running Microsoft® Windows Server™ 2000, Microsoft® Windows Server™ 2003, Standard Edition; Windows Server 2003, Enterprise Edition; and Windows Server 2003, Datacenter Edition. Active Directory stores information about objects on the network and makes this information easy for administrators and users to find and use. Active Directory uses a structured data store as the basis for a logical, hierarchical organization of directory information.

This data store, also known as the directory, contains information about Active Directory objects. These objects typically include shared resources such as servers, volumes, printers, and the network user and computer accounts.

Security is integrated with Active Directory through logon authentication and access control to objects in the directory. With a single network logon, administrators can manage directory data and organization throughout their network, and authorized network users can access resources anywhere on the network. Policy-based administration eases the management of even the most complex network.

Active Directory also includes:

- A set of rules, the schema, that defines the classes of objects and attributes contained in the directory, the constraints and limits on instances of these objects, and the format of their names.
- A global catalog that contains information about every object in the directory. This allows users and administrators to find directory information regardless of which domain in the directory actually contains the data.
- A query and index mechanism, so that objects and their properties can be published and found by network users or applications.
- A replication service that distributes directory data across a network. All domain controllers in a domain participate in replication and contain a complete copy of all directory information for their domain. Any change to directory data is replicated to all domain controllers in the domain.
- Support for Active Directory client software, which makes many features on Microsoft® Windows® 2000 Professional, Windows XP Professional, or Microsoft® Vista® Business available to computers running Windows 95, Windows 98, and Windows NT® Server 4.0. To client computers not running Active Directory client software, the directory will appear like a Windows NT directory.