

Understanding IP Directed Broadcast for EX-series Switches

IP directed broadcast helps you implement remote administration tasks such as backups and wake-on-LAN (WOL) application tasks by sending broadcast packets targeted at the hosts in a specified destination subnet. IP directed broadcast packets traverse the network in the same way as unicast IP packets until they reach the destination subnet. When they reach the destination subnet and IP directed broadcast is enabled on the receiving switch, the switch translates (“explodes”) the IP directed broadcast packet into a broadcast that floods the packet on the target subnet. All hosts on the target subnet receive the IP directed broadcast packet.

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IP Directed Broadcast for EX-series Switches Overview

IP directed broadcast packets have a destination IP address that is a valid broadcast address for the subnet that is the target of the directed broadcast (the target subnet). The intent of an IP directed broadcast is to flood the target subnet with the broadcast packets without broadcasting to the entire network. IP directed broadcast packets cannot originate from the target subnet.

When you send an IP directed broadcast packet, as it travels to the target subnet, the network forwards it in the same way as it forwards a unicast packet. When the packet reaches a switch that is directly connected to the target subnet, the switch checks to see whether IP directed broadcast is enabled on the interface that is directly connected to the target subnet:

- If IP directed broadcast is enabled on that interface, the switch broadcasts the packet on that subnet by rewriting the destination IP address as the configured broadcast IP address for the subnet. The switch converts the packet to a link-layer broadcast packet that every host on the network processes.
- If IP directed broadcast is disabled on the interface that is directly connected to the target subnet, the switch drops the packet.

IP Directed Broadcast Implementation for EX-series Switches

You configure IP directed broadcast on a per-subnet basis by enabling IP directed broadcast on the Layer 3 interface of the subnet’s VLAN. When the switch that is connected to that subnet receives a packet that has the subnet’s broadcast IP address as the destination address, the switch broadcasts the packet to all hosts on the subnet.

By default, IP directed broadcast is disabled.

When to Enable IP Directed Broadcast

IP directed broadcast is disabled by default. Enable IP directed broadcast when you want to perform remote management or administration services such as backups or WOL tasks on hosts in a subnet that does not have a direct connection to the Internet.

Enabling IP directed broadcast on a subnet affects only the hosts within that subnet. Only packets received on the subnet's Layer 3 interface that have the subnet's broadcast IP address as the destination address are flooded on the subnet.

When Not to Enable IP Directed Broadcast

Typically, you do not enable IP directed broadcast on subnets that have direct connections to the Internet. Disabling IP directed broadcast on a subnet's Layer 3 interface affects only that subnet. If you disable IP directed broadcast on a subnet and a packet that has the broadcast IP address of that subnet arrives at the switch, the switch drops the broadcast packet.

If a subnet has a direct connection to the Internet, enabling IP directed broadcast on it increases the network's susceptibility to denial-of-service (DoS) attacks.

For example, a malicious attacker can spoof a source IP address (use a source IP address that is not the actual source of the transmission to deceive a network into identifying the attacker as a legitimate source) and send IP directed broadcasts containing Internet Control Message Protocol (ICMP) echo (ping) packets. When the hosts on the network with IP directed broadcast enabled receive the ICMP echo packets, they all send replies to the victim that has the spoofed source IP address. This creates a flood of ping replies in a DoS attack that can overwhelm the spoofed source address; this is known as a "smurf" attack. Another common DoS attack on exposed networks with IP directed broadcast enabled is a "fraggle" attack, which is similar to a smurf attack except that the malicious packet is a User Datagram Protocol (UDP) echo packet instead of an ICMP echo packet.

- Related Topics**
- Example: Configuring IP Directed Broadcast on an EX-series Switch
 - Configuring IP Directed Broadcast (CLI Procedure)