

Application programming interface key

An **application programming interface key** (**API key**) is a unique identifier used to authenticate a user, developer, or calling program to an API.^[1] However, they are typically used to authenticate a *project* with the API rather than a human user.^{[1][2]} Different platforms may implement and use API keys in different ways.

Contents

Usage

HTTP APIs

Security

References

External links

Usage

The API key often acts as both a unique identifier and a secret token for authentication, and will generally have a set of access rights on the API associated with it and ***.^[3]

HTTP APIs

API keys for HTTP-based APIs can be sent in multiple ways:^[4]

In the query string:

```
POST /something?api_key=abcdef12345 HTTP/1.1
```

As a request header:

```
GET /something HTTP/1.1
X-API-Key: abcdef12345
```

As a cookie:

```
GET /something HTTP/1.1
Cookie: X-API-KEY=abcdef12345
```

Security

API keys are generally not considered secure; they are typically accessible to clients, making it easy for someone to steal an API key. Once the key is stolen, it has no expiration, so it may be used indefinitely, unless the project owner revokes or regenerates the key.^[2] If an API key is meant to be accessible to the client, it is only considered secure if used together with other security mechanisms such as HTTPS/SSL.^[4]

References

1. "API Key - What is an API Key?" (<https://blog.rapidapi.com/api-glossary/api-key/>). *Last Call - RapidAPI Blog*. Retrieved 2019-09-20.
2. "Why and when to use API keys | Cloud Endpoints with OpenAPI" (<https://cloud.google.com/endpoints/docs/openapi/when-why-api-key>). *Google Cloud*. Retrieved 2019-09-20.
3. IBM Application Security on Cloud (Generating API Keys) (https://www.ibm.com/support/knowledgecenter/SSYJJF_1.0.0/ApplicationSecurityonCloud/appseccloud_generate_api_key_cm.html)
4. "API Keys" (<https://swagger.io/docs/specification/authentication/api-keys/>).

External links

- Why and When to Use API Keys (<https://cloud.google.com/endpoints/docs/openapi/when-why-api-key>)

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