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Internet-Draft	GoDaddy
Intended status: Experimental	June TBD, 2016
Expires: November 29, 2016	

Push-Assets Header Field

draft-asilvas-http-push-assets-00

Abstract

Push-Assets is a header field that extends client state for dependent requests, enabling servers to utilize HTTP/2 Server Push with confidence in knowing what resources SHOULD or SHOULD NOT be sent, reducing waste, and ultimately providing an improved user experience. This document will provide an overview of Push-Assets requirements, and describes any implementation concerns.

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1. Introduction

As described in [\[HighPerformance\]](#), transfer sizes and document requests continue to increase. While network conditions continue to improve, resulting in lower latencies and increased bandwidth, HTTP/1.1 ([\[RFC7230\]](#) and [\[RFC7231\]](#)) fails to address the underlying problem of document dependencies and the resulting "waterfall" of blocked requests.

HTTP/2 [\[RFC7540\]](#) aims to address some of these problems, by way of Streams and Multiplexing, combined with HTTP/2 Server Push [\[RFC7540\]](#). A ruthless combination, addressing "head-of-line blocking" through Multiplexing, and optimistic pre-loading by way of Server Push.

Where Server Push begins to fall short is around client state, leaving it up to servers to leverage existing HTTP State Management Mechanism [\[RFC6265\]](#) with Cookies, which are not purpose built to solve the problem of document dependency state. This lack of client state can result in HTTP/2 [\[RFC7540\]](#) RST_STREAM, where-in in-flight Server Push Streams will be cancelled, incurring client and server waste.

This document aims to address document dependency state by looking to Caching [\[RFC7234\]](#) familiar with existing HTTP/1.1 requests (see [\[RFC7230\]](#) and [\[RFC7231\]](#)). By pulling this state data into the parent request, servers are able to intelligently and responsibly Server Push only missing or outdated dependencies.

1.1. Terminology

In this document, the key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14, RFC 2119 [\[RFC2119\]](#) and indicate requirement levels for compliant implementations.

This document uses the Augmented BNF defined in [\[RFC5234\]](#).

2. Understanding The Problem

Here we can begin to see the problem with vanilla HTTP/2 [\[RFC7540\]](#) Server Push using one of many custom cookie-based implementations to manage client state.

```

+-----+-----+
| Empty Cache | Request A      |
+-----+-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE A1 |
      +-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE AB1 |
      +-----+
      | Response A      |
      +-----+
      | Response A1     |
      +-----+
      | Response AB1    |
+-----+-----+
| Partial Cache | Request B      |
+-----+-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE B1 |
      +-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE AB1 | <== EVIL
      +-----+
      | Response B      |
      +-----+
      | Response B1     |
      +-----+
      | Response AB1    | <== EVIL
      +-----+
      | RST_STREAM AB1  | <== EVIL
      +-----+

```

Figure 1

With Push-Assets enabled both client and server adhere to a strict dependency state contract.

```

+-----+-----+
| Empty Cache | Request A      |
+-----+-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE A1 |
      +-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE AB1 |
      +-----+
      | Response A      |
      +-----+
      | Response A1     |
      +-----+
      | Response AB1    |
+-----+-----+
| Partial Cache | Request B      |
+-----+-----+
      | PUSH_PROMISE B1 |

```

```

+-----+
| Response B   |
+-----+
| Response B1  |
+-----+

```

Figure 2

3. Push Assets Use Cases

3.1. First Load Experience

Often the most important visit to a site is the first. Push-Assets provides the necessary client state for the server to confidently know which resources are missing or outdated.

3.2. Subsequent Load Experience

As users navigate to previously visited pages, or new pages where some shared resources have been cached, Push-Assets provides ample client state to continue making efficient use of Server Push, only sending what resources the client does not already have.

3.3. Proxy Optimization

On one end of the spectrum of proxies lies your server proxies, with CDN's on the other end.

```
[Client] <==[CDN]<===== [Proxy]<==[Origin]
```

Figure 3

With Push-Assets providing efficient communication between two points, this may lead to potential benefits between Proxies and their Origin server as well. While the Proxy nearest your Client SHOULD support Push-Assets for best results, it MAY elect not to also leverage Push-Assets between the Proxy and Origin.

For proxies with caching nearest to Client (namely CDN's), they may further benefit from Push-Assets for an efficient utilization of Server Push.

3.4. Non-Browser Clients

Leveraging the benefits of Push-Assets allows for more efficient communication with compatible servers. The more complex the data, the greater the potential benefits.

3.5. Alternative Content Types

With Push-Assets being nothing more than an HTTP Header, extending the benefits to other Content Type's [\[RFC2045\]](#) is entirely up to the Client and Server. Consider circumstances where you retrieve a JSON document, which signals relationships with other documents. Push-Assets reduces waste and enables better user experiences regardless of the Content-Type.

4. Push-Assets Header

```
Push-Assets = [*][Asset-Key=Caching-Headers][;Asset-Key=Caching-Headers]
```

A REQUIRED Request Header.

Comprised of zero or more Assets addressed by their Asset Key.

An Asset-Key is the name of the asset uniquely identifiable by the document or matching documents.

4.1. Caching Headers

```
Push-Assets = Asset-Key=[etag(etag-value),][last-modified(date)][no-push]
```

Caching MAY include an ETag, and/or Last-Modified, or No-Push. This provides necessary client state of dependencies to server.

4.2. Empty Cache Request

```
Push-Assets = *
```

Where * informs server to Push all push-enabled dependencies, if Push-Assets is enabled. Servers are NOT required to push any or all dependencies, but MUST push all missing or outdated push-enabled assets.

5. Push-Asset-Key Header

```
Push-Asset-Key = [$][Asset-Key]
```

A REQUIRED PUSH_PROMISE Response Header.

Unlike the Asset-Key in a Request, the Push-Asset-Key Header corresponds to the Key of the PUSH_PROMISE Response.

5.1. Named Key

```
Push-Asset-Key = core-bundle.js
```

By naming an asset, you MAY share that asset across multiple documents, and MAY change the URI [\[RFC3986\]](#) as necessary.

5.2. Key from URI Path

```
Push-Asset-Key = $
```

Where \$ is reserved as a short-hand for the client to recognize the key as the URI Path [\[RFC3986\]](#), and MUST NOT include the query string.

Example URI Path [\[RFC3986\]](#) of /my/document?some=thing would be keyed as /my/document.

6. Push-Asset-Match Header

```
Push-Asset-Match = Asset-Path[;Asset-Path]
```

An OPTIONAL PUSH_PROMISE Response Header.

An Asset-Match supports the lexical matching of the URI Path [\[RFC3986\]](#), and MAY end with reserved wildcard * to indicate matching all requests "equal or greater than" the URI Path. While one or more Asset-Path's may be provided, they SHOULD be consistent between requests to avoid any caching proxies from serving varying responses. Usage of Vary header field (Section 7.1.4 of [\[RFC3986\]](#)) MAY be applied with Push-Asset-Match to permit varying responses, but SHOULD NOT be used in most scenarios to avoid

unnecessary complexity.

6.1. Match Similar Requests

```
Push-Asset-Match = /some-path/*
```

Where all requests with URI Path [\[RFC3986\]](#) greater than or equal to /some-path/ will be matched.

6.2. Match All Requests

```
Push-Asset-Match = *
```

* by itself corresponds to "match all requests". This is the equivalent of /*.

7. References

7.1. Normative References

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