

Fabric Overview

The Cisco MDS 9000 Family NX-OS command-line interface (CLI) can configure and manage features such as VSANs, SAN device virtualization, dynamic VSANs, zones, distributed device alias services, Fibre Channel routing services and protocols, FLOGI, name server, FDMI, RSCN database, SCSI targets, FICON, and other advanced features.

This chapter describes some of these features and includes the following topics:

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Virtual SANs

Virtual SAN (VSAN) technology partitions a single physical SAN into multiple VSANs. VSAN capabilities allow Cisco NX-OS software to logically divide a large physical fabric into separate, isolated environments to improve Fibre Channel SAN scalability, availability, manageability, and network security. For FICON, VSANs facilitate hardware-based separation of FICON and open systems.

Each VSAN is a logically and functionally separate SAN with its own set of Fibre Channel fabric services. This partitioning of fabric services greatly reduces network instability by containing fabric reconfigurations and error conditions within an individual VSAN. The strict traffic segregation provided by VSANs helps ensure that the control and data traffic of a specified VSAN are confined within the VSAN's own domain, increasing SAN security. VSANs help reduce costs by facilitating consolidation of isolated SAN islands into a common infrastructure without compromising availability.

Users can create administrator roles that are limited in scope to certain VSANs. For example, a network administrator role can be set up to allow configuration of all platform-specific capabilities, while other roles can be set up to allow configuration and management only within specific VSANs. This approach improves the manageability of large SANs and reduces disruptions due to human error by isolating the effect of a user action to a specific VSAN whose membership can be assigned based on switch ports or the worldwide name (WWN) of attached devices.

VSANs are supported across FCIP links between SANs, which extends VSANs to include devices at a remote location. The Cisco MDS 9000 Family switches also implement trunking for VSANs. Trunking allows Inter-Switch Links (ISLs) to carry traffic for multiple VSANs on the same physical link.

Dynamic Port VSAN Membership

Port VSAN membership on the switch is assigned on a port-by-port basis. By default each port belongs to the default VSAN. You can dynamically assign VSAN membership to ports by assigning VSANs based on the device WWN. This method is referred to as Dynamic Port VSAN Membership (DPVM). DPVM offers flexibility and eliminates the need to reconfigure the port VSAN membership to maintain fabric topology when a host or storage device connection is moved between two Cisco MDS switches or two ports within a switch. DPVM retains the configured VSAN regardless of where a device is connected or moved.

SAN Device Virtualization

Cisco SAN device virtualization (SDV) allows virtual devices representing physical end devices to be used for SAN configuration. Virtualization of SAN devices significantly reduces the time needed to swap out hardware. For example, if a storage array was replaced without using SDV, server downtime would be required for SAN zoning changes and host operating system configuration updates. With SDV, only the mapping between virtual and physical devices needs to change after hardware is swapped, insulating the SAN and end devices from extensive configuration changes.



Note SDV is not supported from Cisco MDS NX-OS Release 4.x and later.

Zoning

Zoning provides access control for devices within a SAN. Cisco NX-OS software supports the following types of zoning:

- N port zoning—Defines zone members based on the end-device (host and storage) port.
  - WWN
  - Fibre Channel identifier (FC-ID)
- Fx port zoning—Defines zone members based on the switch port.
  - WWN
  - WWN plus interface index, or domain ID plus interface index
- Domain ID and port number (for Brocade interoperability)
- iSCSI zoning—Defines zone members based on the host zone.
  - iSCSI name
  - IP address

- LUN zoning—When combined with N port zoning, LUN zoning helps ensure that LUNs are accessible only by specific hosts, providing a single point of control for managing heterogeneous storage-subsystem access.
- Read-only zones—An attribute can be set to restrict I/O operations in any zone type to SCSI read-only commands. This feature is especially useful for sharing volumes across servers for backup, data warehousing, etc.



Note LUN zoning and read-only zones are not supported from Cisco MDS NX-OS Release 5.x and later.

- Broadcast zones—An attribute can be set for any zone type to restrict broadcast frames to members of the specific zone.

To provide strict network security, zoning is always enforced per frame using access control lists (ACLs) that are applied at the ingress switch. All zoning polices are enforced in hardware, and none of them cause performance degradation. Enhanced zoning session-management capabilities further enhance security by allowing only one user at a time to modify zones.

Distributed Device Alias Services

All switches in the Cisco MDS 9000 Family support Distributed Device Alias Services (device alias) on a per-VSAN basis and on a fabric-wide basis. Device alias distribution allows you to move host bus adapters (HBAs) between VSANs without manually reentering alias names.

Fibre Channel Routing Services and Protocols

Fabric Shortest Path First (FSPF) is the standard path selection protocol used by Fibre Channel fabrics. The FSPF feature is enabled by default on all Fibre Channel switches. You do not need to configure any FSPF services except in configurations that require special consideration. FSPF automatically calculates the best path between any two switches in a fabric. Specifically, FSPF is used to perform these functions:

- Dynamically compute routes throughout a fabric by establishing the shortest and quickest path between any two switches.
- Select an alternative path in the event of the failure of a given path. FSPF supports multiple paths and automatically computes an alternative path around a failed link. FSPF provides a preferred route when two equal paths are available.

Multiprotocol Support

In addition to supporting Fibre Channel Protocol (FCP), Cisco NX-OS software supports IBM Fibre Connection (FICON), Small Computer System Interface over IP (iSCSI), and Fibre Channel over IP (FCIP) in a single platform. Native iSCSI support in the Cisco MDS 9000 Family switches helps customers consolidate storage for a wide range of servers into a common pool on the SAN.