Why do I get "Forbidden" when trying to view a directory in my Athena locker over the web?

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I had a directory which was publically readable on http://web.mit.edu/ or http://www.mit.edu/. When people visit the folder they get an error message instead of seeing an index list of the files.

Examples

The error for http://web.mit.edu/example/Public/ may say:

> ***403 Forbidden***
>
> ***Forbidden***
>
> *You don't have permission to access /example/Public/ on this server.*

The error for http://www.mit.edu/~example/public/ may say:

> ***MIT 403 Error - permission denied***
>
> ***permission denied***
>
> *You do not have permission to access the requested url, or the server was unable to access the requested file.*

Answer

In June 2015, there was a change with how the MIT web servers handle folders that have no index.html file. Be default, the MIT web server will no longer show an automatic index listing of your files. If you want the MIT web server to display a list of your files, you can turn on this option using a `.htaccess.mit` file with a special "Options line:

1. create a file named `.htaccess.mit` in the folder that should be public.
2. put a line into the `.htaccess.mit` file that says:

```
Options +Indexes
```

> ℹ️ **required AFS permission "system:anyuser read"**
> This feature still requires the directory to be readable by "system:anyuser". For more information, please see Who has permission to change files in a locker or website? and How do permissions work in AFS?

Step-by-step instructions for Athena

1. Login to Athena
   - Go to http://athena.dialup.mit.edu
   - Type your MIT username and password to login
2. At the prompt, navigate to the directory you want to change. For example, to change to your www directory:

```
cd ~/www
```

3. Create a .htaccess.mit file if it doesn't already exist

```
touch .htaccess.mit
```

4. add the line "Options +Indexes"

```
echo "Options +Indexes" >> .htaccess.mit
```

5. Test your folder on the web to make sure the behavior is as you intend.

If you have any questions about how to make this change, please contact helpesk@mit.edu

Announcement regarding changes

Announcement email
Dear All, On June 16, 2015, Information Systems & Technology (IS&T) will change the default behavior of web.mit.edu by turning off the automatic creation of a directory listing for websites. Previously, if a website did not have an index page, web.mit.edu would automatically generate a list of files and folders within the site that a visitor would be able to browse. Disabling this feature aligns with current security best practices to protect data from accidental exposure. This change will affect all sites hosted on web.mit.edu and in Athena lockers; no effort is required from individual users. If you have any questions please email helpdesk@mit.edu