



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

University of Edinburgh Professes Digital Literacy with Branded Links

From Nobel laureates and Olympic champions to space explorers and prime ministers, the University of Edinburgh has been influencing history since it opened the gates to its first students in 1583. Today, it has over 44,000 students and 10,000 staff. In addition to its main website, the university also hosts an additional 1,500 websites. With so many constituents to serve, it can be challenging to establish and maintain brand identity, and to assure that all links across their many communications channels are secure.

Duncan MacGruer, Portal Services Manager at the University of Edinburgh, explains that without a link strategy and policy, maintaining professional, branded and trusted links was not feasible across such a large institution. Long links were frequently used in communications, which not only looked messy, but also often line-wrap and break. They were published on posters and leaflets, resulting in poor response rates since students couldn't remember the long links or mistyped them. Even when short links were used, they leveraged the name of various link shortening companies, so it was unclear to students whether the link would lead to a university-trusted site.

The University of Edinburgh turned to Bitly in order to streamline—and brand—its use of short links. Now, using the custom domain “edin.ac,” constituents can easily identify a university-generated link and be certain that it'll lead them to a safe destination. “Putting our brand name on our links certifies that it's a trusted link associated with the university,” states MacGruer.



“This is a world of information security. We are trying to teach our students digital literacy skills and that you should not just click on any old link. We don't use hyperlinks in our digital marketing because we believe it's important that all links are identifiable and trusted. By having our brand on the short URLs, our constituents can rest assured that it's going to a trusted university source—and that is huge.”

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To make the links even friendlier, the University of Edinburgh often customizes the back-halves so that the links are memorable and the constituent knows exactly where it will lead them. For example, the university hosts a lot of events that require registration. By following a naming convention for the back-half of their links, monthly events display the event name and the month in the links themselves. That helps constituents see that it's for the current university event.

Bitly has also helped the university's marketers become less dependent on the centralized IT department. MacGruer explains, "A developer may create a web application and publishes a link in the app. If the marketer needs to change the link destination to another landing page, rather than having to wait for a shared IT resource to make the change, they just log into Bitly and redirect the link themselves. Marketers are controlling their marketing and timelines and IT is less taxed."

The same applies to reviewing link engagement metrics. For social media and their more sophisticated marketing campaigns, the university sets UTM parameters before shortening them so they can measure ROI and conversion in Google Analytics. In the case of users wanting to simply see how many people are engaging with their content, they can measure click engagement in Bitly without needing any IT assistance. "When you're generating 50,000 links per year, not having to rely on centralized IT for analytics is very important to us," states MacGruer.

In addition to the benefits University of Edinburgh has reaped from branding and tracking, they also measure success by usage. MacGruer explains, "Our high user adoption demonstrates that our users find value using Bitly."

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