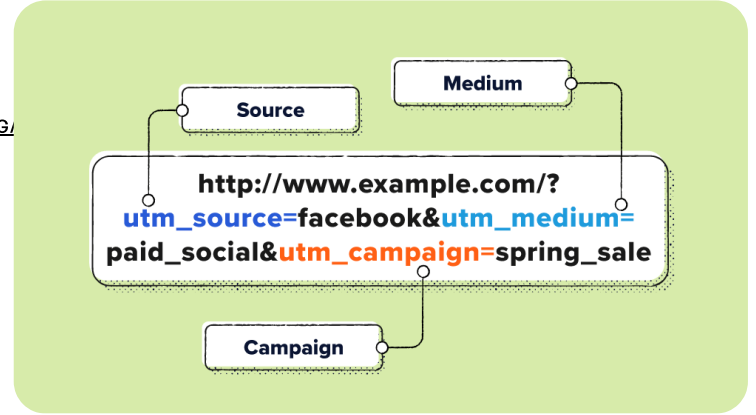


ANALYTICS

(<https://bitly.com/blog/category/analytics/>), URL SHORTENING
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What Is a Tracking Link & How To Create One

January 9, 2024 • 11 min read



To make your future communications and interactions successful, you need to know which links customers engage with. [Link tracking](https://bitly.com/blog/link-tracking-explained/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/link-tracking-explained/>), or URL tracking, is a great way for marketers to see that information—it shows you which links get clicks so you can measure what’s working in your campaigns (and what isn’t).

But while businesses track links to evaluate marketing campaign success, that’s far from link tracking’s only use case.

Below, we’ll explore tracking URLs in detail, explain how they work, and outline the uses and benefits of [link-tracking tools](https://bitly.com/blog/best-link-trackers/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/best-link-trackers/>). We’ll also look at how Bitly’s link shortening and analytics tools can integrate with your campaigns for better insights into your audience.

What is a tracking link?

A tracking link shows customer activity based on the marketing campaign. They manage and measure the effectiveness of marketing activities, channels, and campaigns.

We recommend using a tracking link whenever you send traffic to a landing page or website from an external channel, like banner ads, PPC campaigns, email, and [social media](https://bitly.com/blog/social-media-monitoring/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/social-media-monitoring/>).

Tracking links look like regular URLs with tags added at the end. These tags, called parameters, indicate where a visitor comes from, what content they clicked through, and [which campaign the content relates to](https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2023/06/15/how-to-correctly-set-your-digital-marketing-kpis/?sh=5901e7883d97) (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2023/06/15/how-to-correctly-set-your-digital-marketing-kpis/?sh=5901e7883d97>).

You might see a URL in the wild that looks something like this:

http://www.example.com/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=paid_social&utm_campaign=spring_sale

This is a tracking link. (We’ll explore the details of the parameters a bit more in the next section.)

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X

As you might imagine, these links can get long depending on how many parameters you add. But as unwieldy as they can become, they're often the best way to study the nitty-gritty details of your campaign—including how people found you, who your audience is, and why they're visiting your marketing materials.

How does a tracking link work?

Link tracking works by attaching a digital tracking code to a URL on your website. To create the link, you can use a [URL builder](https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1033867?hl=en) (<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1033867?hl=en>) to input the information from the campaign. A URL builder relies on [UTM parameters](https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-utm-parameters/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-utm-parameters/>) and codes to create the link.

Examples of tracking tags with [parameters and UTM code](https://bitly.com/blog/what-are-utm-codes/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/what-are-utm-codes/>)s include:

- **Campaign:** The campaign refers to the type of campaign you're running. A UTM code for a new promotion might appear as: **utm_campaign=free_gift**.
- **Source:** The source refers to which channel the person came from. A UTM code might appear as: **utm_source=cpc**.
- **Medium:** The medium refers to the larger category of how the traffic was generated (like social media or email). A UTM code might appear as: **utm_medium=email**.

It's worth noting that these are just the core parameters of tracking URLs, and marketers can add on far more than just the above examples. Setting parameters allows you to track customer activity (clicks/engagements) for that specific link only. Every tracking link is unique; therefore, the data for each link relates *only* to that link.

Put another way, when someone follows a tracking link, the link stores the information in a different location than if they had followed non-tracking links. So, let's say you want to direct your audience to a landing page. To do this, you run campaigns on an affiliate blog, Google paid ads, and your company newsletter.

Each tracking link would look different, even though they would all direct visitors to the same page. The links might look like this:

- **Affiliate blog:** http://www.example.com/?utm_source=affiliate&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=20_off
- **Google paid ads:** http://www.example.com/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=summer_sale
- **Company newsletter:** http://www.example.com/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=free_gift

These links will identify where the person clicked ([click tracking](https://bitly.com/blog/click-tracking/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/click-tracking/>)), so it's easier to see which medium had the best return on investment (ROI).

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The benefits of tracking links

Tracking links help you measure an advertising or marketing activity's impact on your business's growth.

If a retailer runs a sales promotion, they might see a surge of new customers. However, knowing *where* those customers come from is crucial to understanding the success of your campaign.

(<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https%3A%2F%2Fbitly.com%2Fblog%2Ftracking%2F>)

(<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fbitly.com%2Fblog%2Ftracking%2F>)

bitly.is/trackinglinks

Tracking links are a highly effective yet simple way to gather this type of information. Using these links helps you calculate ROI without manually searching through tedious data reports to see how much traffic comes from a single source.

When you use Bitly for [link management](https://bitly.com/blog/link-management/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/link-management/>), tracking links becomes easy and efficient. Bitly's [link shortener](https://bitly.com/pages/products/url-shortener) (<https://bitly.com/pages/products/url-shortener>) can condense long tracking links to save space on social media posts, and robust analytics make it easy to access all relevant information from multiple sources into one [user-friendly dashboard](https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-dashboard/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-dashboard/>).

Let's take a closer look at how [Bitly tracking links](https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-vs-google-analytics/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-vs-google-analytics/>) can benefit your channels and marketing initiatives.

Better campaign analytics

Modern marketers need to know more than just where the customer started their journey—they need to know which keywords got the most attention, how people share content on social media platforms, and which demographics respond to which content.

Thankfully, when you use [campaign management analytics](https://bitly.com/pages/features/campaign-management-analytics) (<https://bitly.com/pages/features/campaign-management-analytics>) on tracking links, you help your business keep up with these new needs. Links are the key to separating your campaign channels, seeing which platforms were effective, and what actions were prompted (like joining a waitlist or buying a product).

The tags track which mediums are most effective, so you can focus on the channels customers are on. More than that, it gives you more insight into customer behavior, so there are fewer questions about which tactics worked best. Your analytics can more easily connect which words or pictures triggered a behavior by studying the results of each click.

With Bitly, you can track all of your metrics from a single dashboard with the help of unique URLs. You can see how your campaigns are performing in real time, giving you a chance to adjust for better results.

Connecting your online and offline marketing strategies

With tracking links, you can directly link online and offline marketing methods and analyze offline campaign results. When executing an offline marketing campaign, you can add a tracking link to your advertisement that is 100% unique to that offline marketing activity.

For example, if you're a restaurant publishing a newspaper ad offering 20% off to new customers, you can use the URL: <http://www.yourrestaurant.com/news20>.

Creating a dedicated landing page for this ad lets you track how many people view and engage with the offline advertising campaign.

Stronger understanding of audience behaviors

Everything your audience does is a message to the marketer, though it's easy for marketers to misinterpret the signals. With the [campaign analytics](https://bitly.com/blog/campaign-analytics/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/campaign-analytics/>) from tracking links, you see more than just what triggered the response. From how long the audience stayed on the page to whether they purchased a product, it's easier to see how the audience reacts to content across channels.

When you can determine which digital assets have the most impact, whether that's product pages or landing pages, you have a better idea of what's driving the audience. No matter what stage of the funnel they're in, you can [customize your marketing efforts](https://bitly.com/blog/marketing-tools/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/marketing-tools/>) to meet them where they are.

Increased engagement and conversions

When you have unique campaign URLs, conversion tracking becomes easier. Once you have the data, you can design more engaging campaigns that are more likely to convert.

While consumer preferences change constantly, the shifts might not be so startling when you know how to connect with the audience. To manage it all, Bitly offers [digital marketing](#)

[. \(https://bitly.com/pages/solutions/digital-marketing\)](https://bitly.com/pages/solutions/digital-marketing) tools to deploy your links across different touchpoints and build [your brand \(https://bitly.com/blog/grow-your-brand-with-short-links/\)](https://bitly.com/blog/grow-your-brand-with-short-links/) into every click.

Simplified reporting and integration

Marketers can use tracking links to generate direct reports and integrate them into other analytical tools, creating a more complete view of your marketing landscape.

URL builders have been updated to allow for near-endless parameter additions. While generating dozens of links for a single campaign can be time-consuming, the initial effort can result in simplified reporting that shows you everything you need to know. For instance, you can create new affiliate links for all of your influencers *and* see which audience demographics engage with them.

When you can use seamless reports to see details that may have otherwise fallen through the cracks, your efforts across marketing channels become more efficient.

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Real-world use cases for tracking URLs

How do you know which traffic is reaching your website from search and which traffic is a direct result of your marketing activities?

With tracking URLs.

Imagine you've invested in a series of LinkedIn advertisements. Tracking links can tell you exactly how much traffic the LinkedIn ad brought to your web page.

It's a more granular understanding than website analytics, which can often offer you bare-bones information about whether there was a spike after the ad. Using the information from tracked links, you can decide whether this marketing activity is cost-effective and profitable.

You can also use tracking links to:

- Determine the click-through rates of an email marketing promotion.
- Track online ads to see how much traffic they generate.
- Track blog posts to see which social media pages generate the most traffic.
- Reveal how much traffic this promotional activity generates if your website is featured on a podcast, press release, or other media.

Lead generation

Tracking links reveal how people found you. These URLs can also help you qualify leads based on whether they followed the link, how long they spent on the site, and whether they took you up on the CTA.

Tracking links empowers marketers to test out different lead-generation strategies because they can quantify the results of each tactic more precisely. So, if you were A/B testing a landing page variation, you could see how leads in the same demographic responded to each version.

Tracking links in email marketing show the number of clicks, their source, and engagement levels. This can help make email content more concise by identifying which content or promotions trigger the audience's actions.

For instance, let's say you're sending an email that includes links about product manufacturing and links about products on sale. You notice that one demographic of customers only engages with the links that lead to discounts, and another demographic only appears interested in the product manufacturing information. In future campaigns, you may consider sending out two email variations for better engagement.

Event promotion

A tracking link will give marketers an early indication of the interest levels in an event, and they can be used across your promotional materials (like digital ads, social media, email invites, and [QR Codes](https://bitly.com/pages/products/qr-codes) (<https://bitly.com/pages/products/qr-codes>)). In addition to helping you predict attendance based on the number of clicks, tracking links help you tailor your content leading up to the event and engage with attendees after it's over.

For instance, if there was overwhelming interest in a particular speaker at an event, you might send out additional content about how you came to partner with them. This post-event communication can drive more interest in your brand and who's behind your cause.

Cross-channel marketing analysis

A URL builder is critical for [cross-channel marketing analysis](https://bitly.com/blog/how-to-power-cross-channel-tracking-with-bitly/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/how-to-power-cross-channel-tracking-with-bitly/>). With tracking links, you can synergize your efforts across multiple mediums.

Marketers may not always realize how disparate their brand can look to their audience segments on different channels until they can see the collective impact of their campaigns. Tracking URLs show which channels outperform others, and campaign analytics give you an idea of how audiences perceive your brand. Cross-channel analysis can be the key to finding your way if you're prone to getting lost in the marketing mix.

Social media marketing campaigns

In the wild world of social media, tracking links tell you which content types stand out on different platforms. This perk has been particularly useful for influencer campaigns that rely on dozens of micro-influencers to promote your brand.

The links and subsequent analysis show you which influencer audience connects with your brand, which can help you refine your strategies. Every piece of data collected from tracking links can be key to improving engagement and converting more people.

How to create tracking links with Bitly

As mentioned, tracking links can get very long if you're not careful. Luckily, URL shortening for link tracking purposes is fast and straightforward with Bitly.

To create a [custom tracking link](https://bitly.com/blog/best-link-trackers/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/best-link-trackers/>), follow these three steps:

1. **Log in** or **sign up** for a Bitly account.
2. Select the **Create new** button at the top left of your Dashboard, or tap **B** from anywhere within the app.
3. Enter your desired long URL into the **Destination** box.
4. Customize the link by adding a **Title**, **Custom back-half**, or filling in any other relevant fields.
5. Select the **Create** button.

Once you create your link, you can share it across email, SMS, print, social media, and anywhere else that will further your marketing efforts.

Using your dedicated Bitly account, you can keep track of the following data on your links:

Bitly Blog



- Total engagements
- Engagements in the last seven days
- Engagements over time
- Week-over-week change
- Locations (city-level data)
- Referrers
- Devices

Keep in mind: Analytics features are available to Bitly's paid subscribers.

Boost your marketing prowess with tracking links from Bitly

Tracking URLs are more than just a 'nice-to-have.' If you want to improve your marketing strategies and get a more comprehensive view of your audience, they're an integral part of [successful campaigns](https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-campaigns/) (<https://bitly.com/blog/bitly-campaigns/>).

The right links can improve ROI, lead to better campaign analytics, and give you deeper insight into the behaviors of your audience. They're not just helpful for a current view of your campaigns—they can inform future campaigns with real, data-driven insights.

With Bitly, you can easily shorten long tracking links or even add your own branding for a polished appearance. Bitly's comprehensive link management makes it easy for your brand to inspire customer confidence and create links that get more engagement—and you can keep track of it all in a comprehensive dashboard.

Done with campaign guesswork? [Get started with Bitly for free today](https://bitly.com/pages/pricing) (<https://bitly.com/pages/pricing>).



Daniel
Wiersema



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Daniel is Bitly's Senior Social Media Manager. He has over 10 years of experience in media coordination, social media management, and event coverage, where he excels at telling stories that engage consumers and communities across platforms and industries.

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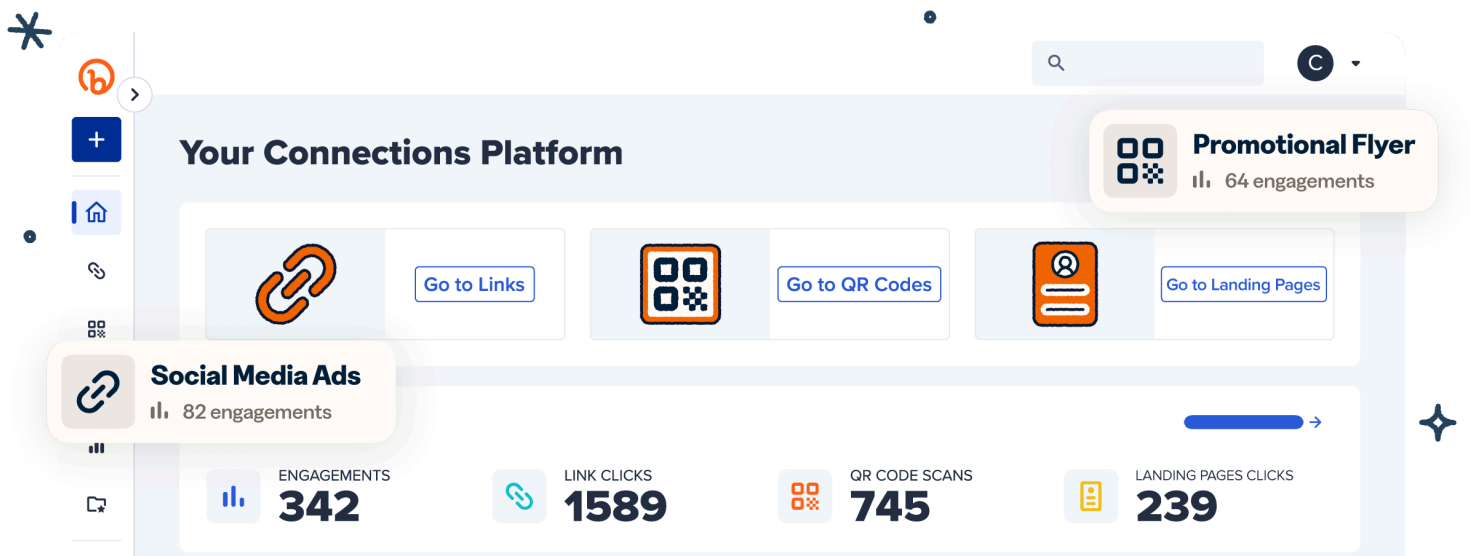
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