

What's this website bit.ly all about?

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*Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org. And don't forget to stop by the Gadgetress' home for the PC Club, at ocregister.com/link/pcclub, to find out how to ask a question and read past answers.*

QUESTION: In your OC Register newspaper articles, you have links that are not understood by this PC user. In a recent article, for example, you give "File and printer sharing in Windows Vista" (link bit.ly/2DZiib). I have never seen a link like that and never saw an explanation of it and I am sure I am not the only one that does not understand it.

PC CLUB: In the article "[How to transfer files between Vista and XP PCs](#)," published online on October 6, 2009 and published in print on October 13, 2009, there was a link to get help on "File and printer sharing."

You are correct in that the link was specified as bit.ly/2DZiib. If you were to type bit.ly/2DZiib into the address bar of your Internet browser, you would be taken to the Microsoft page that provides information on file and printer sharing. You could also have entered <http://bit.ly/2DZiib> and gotten the same results.



This is a URL shortener. It takes a long web address and shortens it to something with fewer characters. [Bit.ly](http://bit.ly) is one of the largest shortening services on the web. Another is TinyURL. These are automated services so the new short address looks like gibberish. You can read more about the bit.ly site at <http://bit.ly/pages/about/>.

URL shorteners saves space in print and leaves fewer characters for readers to type into an Internet browser. Instead of typing almost 60 characters into your address bar, you only have to enter 13. Which would you rather do?

By the way, the “ly” in bit.ly is just like the “com” in ocregister.com. The “LY” is the official top-level domain name for the country of Libya just as “US” is for the United States.

Now, back to my example. When you get to the “File and printer sharing” web site, look in your address bar and you will see the actual Web address, a longer one with Microsoft.com in the middle of it.

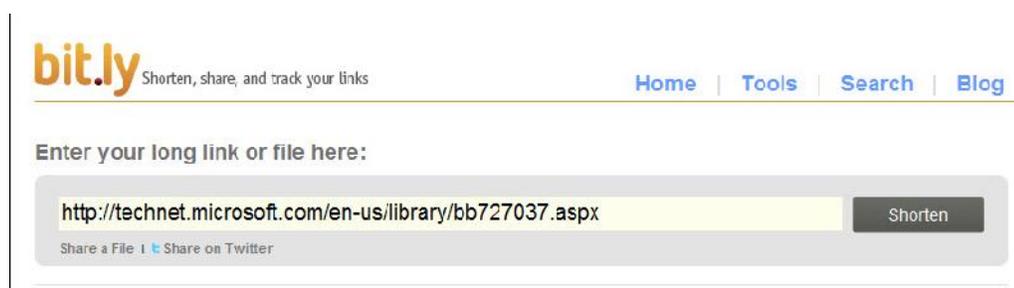
The site <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/bb727037.aspx> is the same as bit.ly/2DZiib.

The text “bit.ly/2DZiib” or “<http://bit.ly/2DZiib>” is nothing more than an Internet address. One note: When you use bit.ly addresses, they are case sensitive. Many Internet addresses are not case sensitive, however. For example, www.pcworld.com will take you to the same place as WWW.PCWORLD.COM.

From now on, however, I will try to exclude the gibberish from bit.ly addresses and only offer something like this: bit.ly/pcclub1.

To use this feature yourself, start with finding a web site you want to share.

1. Then highlight the address in the browser address bar, right-click it and select Copy.
2. Next, go to the bit.ly web site where you will see a text box labeled “Enter your long link or file here:” Right-click inside the text box and select Paste.



The screenshot shows the bit.ly website interface. At the top left is the bit.ly logo with the tagline "Shorten, share, and track your links". To the right are navigation links for Home, Tools, Search, and Blog. Below the navigation is a form with the label "Enter your long link or file here:". Inside the form, the URL "http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/bb727037.aspx" is pasted into a text box. To the right of the text box is a "Shorten" button. Below the text box, there are links for "Share a File" and "Share on Twitter".

3. Now, when you click the Shorten button, an abbreviated version of the original address is created.



The screenshot shows the result of clicking the "Shorten" button. It displays "Your bit.ly link: <http://bit.ly/2DZiib>" with a "Copy" button next to it. To the right, it says "Get real-time stats: <http://bit.ly/2DZiib+>". Below this, it shows the "Long Link: <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/bb727037.aspx>".

You can now use this shorter address instead of the previous one. You can click the “Copy” link to paste it into your Word document, e-mail, [Twitter post](#) or any other place that accepts the pasting of text.

When would you want to use this? One example is the way we use it in our articles. Another is when you want to share a link with someone else. You can pass on the shorter version to make it easy on the other end for the recipient to use it.

One reason why URL shorteners have become popular in the last two years is that popular mini-messaging service [Twitter](#) has a limit on the number of characters users can type in a message. This allows users to allocate more characters to the actual message. If you have a web address that is 60 characters long, you’ll only have room for 80 characters for your message.

Occasionally, web addresses are so long that when pasted into an e-mail they take more than one line, possibly causing confusion. Using bit.ly eliminates this problem.

There is one down-side to using these services and that is, if their site goes down, the short links will cease to work until the site comes back up. Fortunately, this is a rare occurrence. ~*Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his Web site at www.edwardns.com.*