Twitter automates link shrinking to cut characters

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(AP) -- Twitter is offering to automatically shrink your links so they fit within the service's 140-character limit.

Link-shortening services such as bit.ly convert long Web links into a handful of characters. Normally you'd convert the link elsewhere and copy the shortened form to the [Twitter](#) message.

Now, you'll be able to do that all from the message box at Twitter.com. After you type a link, Twitter will automatically shorten it to 19 characters, starting with "t.co." Unlike other shortening services, though, readers of the [tweet](#) won't see the "t.co" version but the actual website you'd be going to, whether it's [YouTube](#).com or a personal blog.

The automatic shrinking feature will be rolled out to users over time. People who prefer another shortening service can still use it the old way.

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