Broken Link Report

What is the Broken Link Report?

The Broken Link Report is a tool you can use to check all of your web page's external and internal links. Essentially, it's a robot that clicks all of your links and looks for any kind of errors that prevent the user from getting to an actual piece of content. The report itself is not perfect, and more importantly, it can be wrong about the broken link. It's best to double-check the report before proceeding with any changes.

Why does the Broken Link Report return unbroken links as not broken? Or clearly broken links as not broken?

The most common false report comes from websites that need a longer load time (due to ping, the actual size of the website, etc). If a website takes longer than 5 seconds to load, it's going to come back "broken." This in part explains why it can take a few minutes to run the actual report. As for the Report missing confirmed broken links, there are a few explanations that may or may not apply. First and foremost, it's typically because of how the website handles their .htaccess. For example, if you try to link to my.vcu.edu, it will tell you it's a broken link since it's pulling the user away from the original URL and into the VCU CAS login. Or more technically, when the robot asks for the link, it gets a 301 HTTP Response Status Code (Moved Permanently). However, if the .htaccess doesn't give a Response Status Code to suggest that it's broken, it will not throw an error, even if the page isn't technically there.

Great, how do I use the report?

1. From the main T4 Navigation Bar: Reports -> Broken Links
2. Clicking "Broken Links" page will immediately start the report. If you're a user with multiple web pages, this is going to take a while. Be patient.
3. After the report finishes, you'll have a page with two tabs. "Internal Links" "External Links"
4. a. An Internal Link is a link that exists ON the domain you're running the report on. For example, if your reference is VCU.EDU: http://www.vcu.edu/contact is a broken internal link.
   b. An External Link is a link that exists OFF the domain you're running the report on. For example, if your reference is VCU.EDU: http://www.angelfire.com/vcu-contact/ is a broken external link.
5. If you have any broken internal link errors, you can view or edit the piece of content immediately.
5. If you click edit, the familiar WYSIWYG editor will open up, with a change. The area should be highlighted in red is where the content/section link once appeared; the content/section has been deleted which is why the link no longer appears. However, there are times this will not happen.

6. Over in the "External Links," clicking the Link URL will bring you to a more detailed look at your broken link, but also takes a bit of time to process. It’s now looking through all of your pages with that exact link. However, once it goes through, you’ll see a new tab: “Statistics.” I used "my.vcu.edu" as an example here.
7. You can access two sets of data here: "General Information" and "Advanced Test Statistics." Clicking on them will expand and minimize.

8. General Information will allow you to see where the link is, and in some cases, allow you to make an edit to correct the link. If you see the "Edit" button, you can do so.
   Advanced Test Statistics will simply give you the HTTP Response Code, which is extremely useful.

   a. For a list of HTTP Response Code's that will result in a broken link, go to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_HTTP_status_codes and see
      3xx Redirection, 4xx Client Error, 5xx Server Error