

Google's March & June 2025 Updates: An In-Depth Analysis of Penalties and AI-Generated Content

I. Executive Summary

The digital marketing landscape has been significantly reshaped by Google's March and June 2025 algorithm updates, prompting widespread discussion and strategic re-evaluation within the SEO community. These updates represent Google's ongoing commitment to enhancing search quality by prioritizing helpful, high-quality content and aggressively combating manipulative practices.

The **March 2025 Core Update**, which rolled out from March 13 to March 27, 2025, was a broad, global adjustment to Google's core ranking systems. Its primary objective was to refine how content quality, relevance, and user trust are assessed, placing a strong emphasis on the principles of "Helpful Content" and E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness).¹ This update was notable for its significant volatility and the reinforcement of key spam policies, including Expired Domain Abuse, Site Reputation Abuse, and Scaled Content Abuse.³

Following closely, the **June 2025 Updates** comprised two distinct components. A Spam Update, announced on June 20 and completed by June 27, focused on refining existing spam detection methods without altering the entire ranking system.¹⁰ Subsequently, a Core Update began rolling out on June 30, expected to take up to three weeks to complete. This second core update of the year further integrated the helpful content system directly into core ranking logic, aiming to enhance search quality by targeting spammy and unhelpful content at a more granular level.¹¹

A central finding across both updates is the unequivocal targeting of **low-quality, thin, unoriginal, and unhelpful content**.³ This includes pages with minimal depth, duplicate content, "zombie" posts (those with no traffic or backlinks), and content created solely for search ranking manipulation. Crucially,

AI-generated text (at scale) was a confirmed target for demotion or de-indexing if it lacked significant human oversight, originality, depth, or genuine value.³ Google's stance is not a blanket ban on AI, but a clear crackdown on its misuse for mass-produced, generic content designed to game search rankings, explicitly addressed by the "Scaled Content Abuse" policy.⁶

SEO forums and community discussions confirmed significant **ranking volatility and traffic drops** for affected sites, particularly those with low-value content.² A particularly impactful trend observed was "The Great Decoupling," where impressions for some sites rose while organic clicks declined. This phenomenon is largely attributed to the increasing prominence of AI Overviews (AIOs) in search results, which provide direct answers and reduce the need for users to click through to source websites.²⁰

To navigate this evolving landscape and future-proof their online presence, websites must prioritize creating unique, high-quality, people-first content that strongly demonstrates E-E-A-T. This strategic approach involves conducting comprehensive content audits, enhancing user experience, strengthening technical SEO foundations, building authentic authority, and critically, diversifying traffic sources beyond traditional organic search.³

II. Understanding Google's March 2025 Core Update

Rollout Timeline and General Impact

The Google March 2025 Core Update, the first core algorithm update of the year, commenced its rollout on March 13, 2025, at 09:00 US/Pacific time and was officially completed on March 27, 2025, at 05:35 US/Pacific, spanning a total of 14 days.¹ Google characterized this as a "regular update" designed to "better surface relevant, satisfying content for searchers from all types of sites," underscoring its global reach across all regions and languages.²

Despite being labeled a "regular" adjustment, the update generated considerable ranking volatility across the search results. Noticeable swings in rankings were observed starting around March 16th, with some analyses indicating it was one of the most volatile updates seen in a year.² This broad impact meant that websites across various industries experienced significant shifts in their search visibility, regardless of their specific niche.

Core Content Quality Shifts and Targeted Behaviors

A primary focus of the March 2025 Core Update was a stronger emphasis on Google's "Helpful Content" system and an increased weighting of E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) signals.³ The overarching goal was to reward content that is genuinely useful, relevant, and of high quality to users, moving away from content created primarily for search engines.

A significant observed consequence of this update was Google's aggressive de-indexing of millions of pages deemed to be of low quality or low engagement.³ This category included, but was not limited to, empty tag or category pages, doorway pages (designed to funnel users to less useful intermediary pages), duplicate or near-duplicate content, and "zombie" blog posts—those that had accumulated no traffic or backlinks over time.³ Content perceived as thin, shallow, unoriginal, or overly aggregated also experienced a notable devaluation in rankings.⁴ This indicates a concerted effort by Google to prune low-value content from its index, aiming to improve the overall quality of search results.

New Spam Policies Introduced/Reinforced

The March 2025 update was intrinsically linked with the introduction and reinforcement of new spam policies, signaling a heightened and intensified effort by Google to combat manipulative SEO tactics.⁶ Google explicitly stated its ambition to reduce low-quality, unhelpful search results by 40-45% through these measures.⁶ These policies represent a more direct and aggressive stance against practices that undermine search quality.

- **Expired Domain Abuse:** This policy specifically targets the practice of acquiring expired domains that still retain a degree of authority and then repurposing them with irrelevant or low-quality content. The sole intent behind this practice is to manipulate search rankings by leveraging the acquired domain's residual authority, rather than providing genuine value to users.³ Google's enhanced detection capabilities now more effectively identify and penalize such abuses.
- **Site Reputation Abuse:** Also known as 'Parasite SEO,' this policy addresses authoritative websites that exploit their strong reputation by hosting unrelated third-party content with minimal oversight. The primary purpose of such content is to manipulate search rankings by piggybacking on the host site's established authority.⁶ This policy, which had a two-month notice period, became effective on May 5, 2024.⁶
- **Scaled Content Abuse:** This policy directly targets the mass production of content, often significantly facilitated by generative AI tools. The core issue is the creation of many pages primarily for manipulating search rankings rather than genuinely helping users.⁶ Google's stated aim is to entirely remove such low-value, mass-produced pages from its Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs).⁶

Community Observations and Affected Site Types

The SEO community widely reported substantial impacts from the March 2025 Core Update. Many SEO professionals observed significant declines, including a reduction in indexed posts, traffic drops as high as 70%, and corresponding profit reductions of up to 75% for some businesses.²

A notable trend involved **forum demotions**, where a general crackdown on low-value content led to decreased visibility for many traditional forums.⁴ However,

Reddit emerged as a significant exception and a clear winner, often gaining prominence for queries not adequately covered by structured publishers and for discussions on products, reviews, and various other topics.¹⁶ This indicates Google is refining its evaluation of forum relevance, favoring platforms that host genuinely helpful, authentic user-generated content (UGC) and "real answers from real people".¹⁵

Websites heavily relying on **programmatic SEO**—content churned out at scale using

templates and automation with little unique value—were specifically penalized, experiencing significant visibility declines.⁵

Analysis of specific site examples provides a clearer picture of the update's impact:

- **Gains:** Sites such as Furla.com (e-commerce), Mowmag.com (digital magazine), Startmag.it (economic news), FLCGIL.it (union portal), local news portals (Monzatoday.it, Today.it), Dica33.it (health information), Hdblog.it (tech), Ilsole24ore.com (finance), Wired.it (tech/culture), Matrimonio.com (weddings), Farmae.it (health products), Deghi.it (home furnishings), and Zalando.it (clothing) saw increased visibility.²⁹ These sites typically demonstrated strong E-E-A-T signals, clear architectural structures, and a consistent focus on user-centric content.
- **Losses:** Generalist, high-volume content platforms experienced significant drops. Examples include Tripadvisor.it, major weather portals (Ilmeteo.it, 3bmeteo.it), Aranzulla.it (generalist tech/how-to), Ansa.it (national news agency), VanityFair.it (lifestyle), IlSussidiario.net (aggregator), and TheWom.it (and its subdomains like healthy.thewom.it, travel.thewom.it).²⁹ These platforms were often characterized by undifferentiated, generalist, or less experiential content that no longer met Google's evolving quality standards.

Deeper Perspectives on March 2025 Core Update

The March 2025 Core Update, combined with the new spam policies, reveals several critical underlying dynamics in Google's approach to search quality.

Google's "Not a Penalty" Stance vs. Real-World Business Impact

Google consistently frames its core updates as "recalibrations" or "re-evaluations" of content relevance, asserting that they are "not a penalty" for wrongdoing.² This communication strategy aims to maintain a narrative of continuous improvement, suggesting that sites experiencing a decline in rankings are simply being outranked by content now deemed "more relevant." This approach also discourages "knee-jerk"

reactions, as Google advises patience and fundamental improvements rather than quick fixes for specific "penalties".³

However, the severe traffic drops (e.g., -70%) and profit losses (e.g., -75%) reported by SEOs and webmasters demonstrate a significant disconnect between Google's technical explanation and the harsh economic realities faced by affected businesses.² For these entities, the practical outcome is indistinguishable from a severe penalty. This contradiction leads to widespread frustration within the SEO community, with many perceiving Google's actions as punitive, regardless of the official terminology.²⁶ The underlying trend here is Google's increasing confidence in its ability to algorithmically assess content quality, even if the precise reasons for a decline remain opaque to affected parties.

The Interplay of Core Update and Spam Policies

The simultaneous rollout of the broad March Core Update and specific new spam policies—Expired Domain Abuse, Scaled Content Abuse, and Site Reputation Abuse—indicates a highly coordinated and aggressive strategy by Google to clean up search results.⁶ A core update, by its nature, recalibrates the entire ranking system, re-evaluating content based on evolving quality signals across the web.² Concurrently, the new spam policies provide explicit rules and mechanisms, including the potential for manual actions, to target specific, identifiable manipulative tactics.

This dual approach means that a site could be negatively impacted by the broad core update due to a relative decline in perceived quality (e.g., its E-E-A-T signals are weaker compared to rising competitors), and simultaneously receive a manual action for violating a specific spam policy (e.g., mass-producing AI content under the Scaled Content Abuse policy). This coordinated attack signifies a more robust and direct enforcement against practices that degrade search quality, making recovery more complex as it requires addressing both systemic quality issues and specific policy violations. Google's stated goal of reducing low-quality content by 40-45% underscores the seriousness and targeted nature of this cleanup.⁶

Nuanced Value of User-Generated Content (UGC)

While many forums experienced demotions during the March update, Reddit stood out as a clear winner, gaining significant prominence.⁴ This outcome suggests a nuanced approach to user-generated content (UGC) by Google. Historically, Google has grappled with the variable quality of forum content, often leading to broad demotions in past updates. The March 2025 update, however, appears to have refined this distinction.

Reddit's success, particularly for queries where users explicitly seek "real, human answers" and its partnerships with AI companies like OpenAI, indicates that Google recognizes the value of high-quality, engaged communities that provide diverse perspectives and crowd-validated insights.²⁸ This implies that not all UGC is treated equally; only authentic, well-moderated, and genuinely helpful community content is favored. Webmasters should therefore focus on fostering genuine community engagement or strategically leveraging platforms like Reddit, rather than simply hosting unmoderated, low-value discussion boards. This represents a shift from a broad, category-based assessment of UGC to a more granular, quality-based evaluation.

Table 1: Google March 2025 Core Update: Penalized Content & Behaviors

This table provides a concise overview of the specific content types and behaviors that were targeted by the March 2025 Core Update. It serves as a practical checklist for webmasters to conduct an initial self-assessment and begin planning recovery strategies. The inclusion of source snippets ensures the credibility of the data and allows for further investigation into specific policies and their implications.

Content Type/Behavior	Impact/Description	Source Snippets
Thin/Low-Value Content	De-indexed, Lower Rankings, Devaluation; lacks depth, superficial, doesn't address user query	³

Duplicate Content	De-indexed, Lower Rankings; near-duplicate content, copy-pasted	3
"Zombie" Blog Posts	De-indexed; posts with no traffic or backlinks	3
Empty Tag/Category Pages	De-indexed; pages with minimal content	3
Doorway Pages	De-indexed, Lower Rankings; irrelevant, low-quality pages to rank for specific queries	3
Programmatic SEO Content	Penalized, Reduced Visibility; churned out at scale with little unique value, templated, keyword-stuffed	5
AI-Generated Content (at scale, unedited, generic)	Harder to Rank, Substantial Ranking Drops, De-indexed; lacks originality/depth/value-add, generic, repetitive, not written for human audience, no human oversight	3
Expired Domain Abuse	Manual Actions, Reduced Visibility; purchasing expired domains to populate with worthless/irrelevant content to manipulate rankings	3
Site Reputation Abuse	Manual Actions, Lower Search Rankings/Removal; authoritative sites hosting unrelated third-party content with little oversight to manipulate rankings	6
Scaled Content Abuse	Manual Actions, Removal from SERPs; many pages generated primarily for manipulating search rankings, large amounts of unoriginal content	6

Manipulative Backlinks (PBNs, purchased links)	Devalued, Loss of Rankings; backlinks from private blog networks, purchased links disguised as guest posts	3
Outdated SEO Tactics (keyword stuffing, low-quality links)	Loss of Rankings, Devaluation; content stuffed with keywords unnaturally, relying on low-quality links	4

III. Understanding Google's June 2025 Core/Spam Update

Rollout Timeline and Primary Focus

Google announced the June 2025 Spam Update on June 20th via Search Central on Twitter, with its rollout concluding a week later on June 27th.¹⁰ The primary goal of this update was to target websites violating Google's spam policies and to enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of its spam filtering efforts, ultimately aiming for better search quality.¹⁰

Subsequently, Google announced the June 2025 Core Update on June 30th. This update began rolling out immediately and was expected to take up to three weeks to complete, extending its effects through much of July.¹¹ As the second core update of 2025, it was described as a broad adjustment to Google's ranking algorithms, not specifically targeting particular content types or violations. Instead, its aim was to improve Google's ability to surface helpful, high-quality content by adjusting how its ranking systems understand helpful content, real trust signals, and overall content quality.¹¹

Specific Content Violations Highlighted (June 20th Spam Update)

While Google did not explicitly detail the *specific new spammy behaviors* targeted by the June 2025 Spam Update, it reiterated a comprehensive list of common forms of spam that continue to be subject to penalties.¹⁰ This serves as a reminder of Google's ongoing vigilance against manipulative practices. These common forms of spam include:

- **Hidden Redirects:** Sending a visitor to a different page than the one they requested.¹⁰
- **Cloaking Content:** Showing different content to search engines and users, an attempt to deceive search algorithms.¹⁰
- **Expired Domain Abuse:** Purchasing an expired website and posting unrelated material to exploit its residual authority, a tactic also targeted by the March update.¹⁰
- **Keyword Stuffing:** Filling a web page with irrelevant keywords or numbers solely to manipulate rankings, which degrades user experience.¹⁰
- **Hacking:** Injecting malicious codes into a website due to its lack of security, harming users and potentially spreading malware.¹⁰
- **Doorway Pages:** Creating irrelevant, low-quality pages designed to rank for specific queries and funnel users to another destination.¹⁰
- **Malware:** Distributing unwanted software that harms user experience.¹⁰
- **Automated Content:** Machine-generated content aimed solely at improving search rankings, often lacking genuine value.¹⁰
- **Link Schemes:** Selling or purchasing links intended to manipulate rankings, rather than being earned naturally.¹⁰
- **Scraped Content:** Content taken from other sites and republished without adding valuable contribution or originality.¹⁰
- **Thin, Duplicated, or Poor-Quality Content:** Webpages lacking substantial information, depth, or originality.¹⁰

The June 2025 Core Update specifically integrated the helpful content system directly into Google's core ranking logic. This meant that each page was judged on its own merit. Pages identified as having low value, being copied directly, or being AI-generated without human edits experienced drops in rankings.¹²

Community Observations and Impacted Site Types

SEOs on platforms like WebmasterWorld and X (formerly Twitter) reported mixed experiences following the June 2025 updates, with early signs of both surges and drops in visibility.¹³ Some tracking tools immediately detected significant volatility in search results.¹³

- **Traffic Drops:** Numerous users reported substantial traffic declines. Examples include a 30% drop in traffic on a new website, a consistent "downward SLOPE trend" from 5,000 clicks to 500, complete loss of visibility in Discover and News, and general "traffic dying".¹³ Some also noted a "huge drop in conversions" alongside traffic fluctuations.³⁵
- **Ranking Fluctuations:** Reports indicated volatile ranking shifts, with some sites seeing their SERP rankings drop for keywords, then temporarily recover, only to drop again.¹³
- **Traffic Increases:** Conversely, some sites experienced positive shifts, with reported increases of approximately 10-20% or even 40-50% week-over-week for certain categories and pages.¹³ A few clients observed slight improvements in keyword rankings and overall website traffic.¹³
- **Impact on Small Publishers:** A concerning observation from Germany indicated that the update appeared to boost large publishers while "sweeping away small ones," leading to collapsed rankings and a "dead" Discover feed for smaller entities in specific niches.¹³
- **Specific Content Types Targeted:** The June update particularly impacted pages characterized by thin content, over-optimized tactics, copied material, and AI-generated content lacking human edits or genuine value. Practices like keyword stuffing and forced footer links also lost their efficacy.¹²
- **Winners:** Sites demonstrating strong E-E-A-T signals and natural content structures tended to maintain or improve their positions.¹² Content-rich sites in health, finance, and education sectors, along with local service providers boasting strong reviews, also saw gains.³³

Deeper Perspectives on June 2025 Core/Spam Update

The June 2025 updates offer further clarity on Google's evolving search priorities, particularly concerning the interaction between AI-driven features and content quality.

The "Great Decoupling" and AI Overviews' Impact on CTR

A prominent trend identified by the SEO community is "The Great Decoupling," where websites observe an increase in impressions but a significant decline in clicks and, consequently, organic traffic.² This phenomenon is largely attributed to the increasing prominence of Google's AI Overviews (AIOs), formerly known as Search Generative Experience. These AI-powered summaries are increasingly answering user queries directly within the Search Engine Results Page (SERP), thereby reducing the need for users to click through to the original source website.²²

While a site may gain impressions by being cited within an AIO, the drastic reduction in Click-Through Rates (CTRs)—reported to be between 18% and 64% for affected queries—poses a critical challenge for content creators.²³ This creates a dilemma: even if content is deemed high-quality enough to be featured in an AIO, publishers may still experience substantial losses in valuable organic traffic. The sentiment among some SEOs, questioning if "AIO" stands for "Artificial

Infringement Overviews," reflects a concern that Google is leveraging their content without adequate attribution or traffic return, potentially undermining the economic model of content creation.¹³ This situation implies a fundamental shift in how value is extracted from search, moving from direct clicks to consumption of information within Google's own ecosystem.

June Update's "Sharper" and "Precise" Impact vs. March's "Wide" Impact

A notable distinction between the two core updates of 2025 is the perceived scope of their impact. As one analysis explicitly stated, "In March, the impact was wide. In June, it was precise. Google linked the helpful content system directly into the core. It scored experience, trust, and usefulness by page not by brand".¹² This observation suggests an evolution in Google's algorithmic sophistication.

The March update, while broad and impactful, might have had more systemic, site-wide effects, potentially influenced by overall domain authority and content strategy.

The June update, by more deeply integrating the helpful content system into the core and judging "by page not by brand," implies a more granular and precise evaluation. This means that even a strong domain could see individual pages drop significantly if they fail to meet specific helpfulness or E-E-A-T standards on a per-page basis. This enhanced "precision" makes recovery efforts more challenging, as it necessitates a detailed, page-level audit and optimization rather than a broad, site-wide strategy. It reinforces the "quality over quantity" mantra at a very detailed and individual content piece level.

The Ongoing Battle Against Manipulative SEO Tactics

The June 20th Spam Update, while not introducing new, specific targets, reiterated a long list of common spam behaviors, including "Automated Content" and "Thin, Duplicated, or Poor-Quality Content".¹⁰ This, combined with the new spam policies introduced with the March update, underscores Google's continuous and evolving effort to combat SEO manipulation.

Google's spam detection capabilities have advanced significantly, incorporating AI technologies like SpamBrain to more effectively identify and eliminate new types of spam.¹⁰ The consistent focus on "Automated Content" and "Thin/Duplicated Content" across both the March and June updates indicates that these remain persistent issues that Google is actively fighting.³ The fact that Google did not specify

new spam behaviors for the June 20th update suggests it was a refinement of existing detection methods rather than an introduction of novel policy targets. This implies that webmasters should not anticipate finding new "loopholes" or "tricks"; instead, they should understand that Google is continually improving its ability to detect and penalize *existing* manipulative practices, particularly those facilitated by AI for scaling content production.

Table 2: Google June 2025 Update: Targeted Spam & Content Issues

This table outlines the common spam and content issues that were either explicitly

targeted or implicitly devalued by the Google June 2025 updates. It provides a clear reference for webmasters to assess their website's compliance with Google's quality guidelines, especially regarding automated and low-quality content.

Content/Behavior Type	Impact/Description	Source Snippets
Automated Content (machine-generated for rankings)	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility, Ignored/Downgraded; content aimed solely at improving search rankings, often without human edits	10
Thin, Duplicated, or Poor-Quality Content	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; webpages lacking substantial information or depth, copied content, low value	10
Scraped Content	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; content taken from other sites and republished without valuable contribution	10
Keyword Stuffing	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility, Ignored/Downgraded; filling pages with irrelevant keywords to manipulate rankings, over-optimized tricks	10
Hidden Redirects	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; sending visitors to different pages than requested	10
Cloaking Content	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; showing different content to search engines and users	10

Expired Domain Abuse	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; purchasing expired websites and posting unrelated material to exploit residual authority	10
Link Schemes	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; selling or purchasing links intended to manipulate rankings	10
Hacking	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; injecting malicious codes into a website	10
Doorway Pages	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; creating irrelevant, low-quality pages to rank for specific queries	10
Malware	Ranking Fluctuations, Penalties, Loss of Visibility; distributing unwanted software that harms user experience	10

IV. The Role of AI-Generated Text (at Scale) in the Updates

The user query specifically asks about AI-generated text and its confirmed status regarding penalties. This is a nuanced area, and the updates provide significant clarity.

Google's Official Stance on AI Content: Nuance vs. Blanket Ban

Google's official position is that it does not penalize AI-generated content simply because it was created by AI.¹⁷ The core focus remains on the quality and usefulness of content, irrespective of its creation method.¹⁷ Google has explicitly stated that "Not all AI-made content is bad. AI has long been used to make helpful things like sports scores and weather reports".¹⁷ The critical distinction lies in whether AI is employed to create "good, original content that helps people" versus using AI "just to trick Google into ranking you higher".¹⁷ This indicates that AI is viewed as a tool, and its impact on rankings depends entirely on its application.

Confirmation of Penalties/Drops for AI-Generated Content (at scale) Lacking Value

Despite the nuanced stance, both the March and June 2025 updates provided clear confirmation that AI-generated content, particularly when produced at scale and lacking genuine value, is a target for demotion or de-indexing.

The March 2025 Core Update notably included "AI-Content Detection Integration" and a reinforced emphasis on "Helpful Content".³ Content that lacked originality, depth, or value-addition compared to competitors was more likely to rank lower, even if AI-assisted.³ Sites that heavily relied on thin, shallow, unoriginal, overly aggregated, or primarily AI-generated content

without significant human value-add reported substantial ranking drops.⁴

The new "Scaled Content Abuse" policy directly targets this issue, defining it as "many pages generated for the primary purpose of manipulating search rankings and not helping users".⁶ This abusive practice typically involves large amounts of unoriginal content providing little value and is often facilitated by generative AI tools.⁶ Google's aim is to completely remove such low-value pages from its SERPs.

Similarly, the June 2025 Core Update resulted in drops for content that was "copied or written by AI with no edits".¹² Discussions within the Reddit SEO community further corroborated this, noting that "AI-generated articles are getting hit unless well-edited".²² The Google Quality Raters Update 2025 is also described as "cracking down on lazy, AI-made content," indicating that main content "full of AI words" might disappear from search results.¹⁹

Perspectives from Quality Rater Guidelines on AI and Low-Effort Content

Google's Quality Rater Guidelines (QRGs) provide crucial insights into how AI-generated content is evaluated. Google has explicitly defined generative AI within these guidelines, describing it as a machine-learning model capable of creating new content.¹⁹ Spam definitions have been reorganized, shifting focus to content produced in large quantities with minimal effort, which includes the misuse of AI.¹⁹

A new section in the QRGs, "Main Content Created with Little Effort," specifically targets low-quality content that is copied, paraphrased, or AI-generated without adding value, leading to a "Lowest" rating.¹⁹ Raters are now guided to identify paraphrased content created by automated tools, looking for indicators such as widely known facts, significant overlap with famous sources like Wikipedia, summarization of existing pages without new additions, and phrases like "As an AI language model".¹⁹ This guidance aims to help raters spot thin content that attempts to appear original but fails to provide a good user experience.

Google emphasizes that "AI can mimic words, but it can't mimic creativity and wisdom".¹⁹ This highlights the importance of human writers, who bring originality, empathy, expertise, and nuance, qualities that are essential for creating high-quality content and, by extension, for avoiding penalties.¹⁹

Impact of AI Overviews (AIO) on Organic Traffic and Click-Through Rates

Beyond the direct impact on AI-generated content quality, the rise of AI Overviews (AIOs) has significantly altered the organic search landscape. AIOs, formerly known as Search Generative Experience (SGE), saw a notable spike during the March 2025 core update, particularly in industries like entertainment, restaurants, and travel.²⁷

These AI-powered summaries are increasingly answering user queries directly within the SERP, leading to a reduction in organic click-through rates (CTRs) even when a site's rankings remain unchanged.²⁰ The overlap between AI Overview citations and Google's top 10 organic positions has decreased, but interestingly, pages ranking

outside the top 10 now have a better chance of being cited in AIOs.³⁷ This phenomenon, where impressions rise but clicks decline, is widely referred to as "The Great Decoupling" by the SEO community.²⁰

SEOs have expressed considerable frustration, with some questioning if "AIO" stands for "Artificial *Infringement* Overviews" ¹³ and lamenting that "AIO is killing SEO".²⁰ Google's John Mueller has confirmed that AIOs are indeed impacted by core updates ³⁷, reinforcing their growing influence on search visibility.

Deeper Perspectives on AI-Generated Text

The comprehensive data from the March and June 2025 updates, coupled with Google's evolving guidelines, provides a multi-faceted view of AI's role in SEO.

The "Quality over Origin" Fallacy and Google's Enforcement

Google's official stance is that it does not penalize AI content *per se*, but rather *low-quality* content, regardless of its origin.¹⁷ However, the simultaneous crackdown on "scaled content abuse" ⁶ and explicit mentions of AI-generated content lacking value ³ strongly suggest that, in practice,

most AI-generated content *at scale* currently falls into Google's "low-quality" bucket.

The theoretical distinction between "AI-generated" and "low-quality" is clear, but the reality is that many AI tools in 2025 produce content that Google's systems deem unhelpful, generic, or lacking E-E-A-T when deployed without human refinement. The explicit mention of "AI-content detection integration" ³ and the detailed guidelines for Quality Raters on how to spot automated paraphrasing ¹⁹ indicate that Google is actively identifying and devaluing content that

looks and *feels* like it was mass-produced by AI, even if it's not explicitly labeled as such. This means that while Google may not have a blanket "no AI" rule, its algorithms are becoming highly effective at identifying the *characteristics* of low-effort, scaled AI content and subsequently demoting it. The onus is therefore on content creators

to ensure that their AI-assisted content is genuinely valuable and indistinguishable from high-quality human-written content.

AI Overviews as a Double-Edged Sword for Publishers

AI Overviews present a significant strategic challenge for publishers. While they can increase impressions by citing pages within the summarized answers ²⁰, they concurrently lead to a substantial decrease in Click-Through Rates (CTR).²⁰ This forces a critical re-evaluation of SEO success metrics.

Traditionally, SEO success was heavily measured by organic clicks and the resulting traffic. With AIOs providing answers directly, the user's search journey is often truncated. Publishers may see their content summarized and presented, gaining a form of "visibility" (impressions) but losing the direct visit (clicks) that generates advertising revenue or conversions. This emerging "zero-click culture" ²² poses an existential threat to content businesses reliant on traditional ad revenue or direct traffic. The advice to "create content that supports decision-making" ³⁶ or offers "compelling unique value (e.g., inside campus videos)" ²² suggests a strategic shift towards content that cannot be easily summarized by AI, or content that encourages a deeper engagement beyond a quick answer. This implies that SEO strategies must evolve from simply ranking for keywords to optimizing for inclusion in AIOs

and providing compelling reasons for users to click through, or by diversifying traffic sources entirely.⁵

AI's Impact on Content Creation Workflows

The emphasis on human oversight, originality, and E-E-A-T, despite the proliferation of AI tools ³, strongly suggests that AI will transform, rather than eliminate, content creation roles. The research clearly indicates that raw, unedited AI content is a liability. However, AI is also presented as a powerful tool to "gather comprehensive information" and "structure original content".¹⁷

This indicates a shift where AI functions as an *assistant* for research, drafting, and optimization. However, human expertise, experience, and editorial judgment become even more critical for adding unique value, ensuring factual accuracy, and meeting stringent E-E-A-T standards. SEOs and content creators will need to integrate AI tools responsibly, focusing on enhancing human-driven content rather than attempting to replace it entirely. This means that the "human touch" ¹⁵ is not merely a recommendation but a fundamental necessity for achieving and maintaining ranking success in the current search environment.

Table 3: Google's Stance on AI Content & Quality Guidelines

This table provides a comprehensive overview of Google's position on AI-generated content, detailing what types of AI content are targeted, how Quality Rater Guidelines identify low-quality AI, and the observed impact of AI Overviews on organic traffic. This clarifies the nuanced approach Google takes and the practical implications for webmasters.

Aspect	Details	Source Snippets
Google's Official Stance	Not penalized <i>per se</i> ; focus is on content quality and usefulness, regardless of creation method; "Not all AI-made content is bad," used for helpful things like sports scores.	¹⁷
Targeted AI Content (examples)	AI content <i>at scale</i> lacking originality/depth/value, unedited AI, mass-produced for rankings, programmatic SEO content (churned out at scale with little unique value), generic/repetitive AI output, AI content without human oversight.	³

Quality Rater Guidelines (QRG) Indicators	Explicit definition of Generative AI; spam definitions reorganized to focus on large quantities/minimal effort (including AI misuse); "Lowest" rating for copied/paraphrased/AI-generated with zero effort or added value; indicators include widely known facts, significant overlap with sources (e.g., Wikipedia), summarization without new additions, phrases like "As an AI language model."	19
Impact on Organic Traffic (via AIOs)	Impressions up, Clicks down ("Great Decoupling"); CTR drops (observed 18-64% decrease for affected queries); "Zero-Click Culture" where users get answers directly from SERP; AI Overviews spiked in entertainment, restaurants, travel industries; pages outside top 10 have better chance of AIO citation.	13

V. Key Takeaways from SEO Forums and Community Chatter

The SEO community's discussions across various forums and social media platforms provide a vital real-world perspective on the impact and sentiment surrounding Google's March and June 2025 updates.

Summary of Common Themes and Frustrations

A pervasive theme among SEOs is **frustration with the high level of volatility** and perceived unpredictability of Google's updates. Some community members have voiced strong skepticism, labeling the updates as a "total scam" or "BS".¹³ A common sentiment is that Google may not fully understand the ramifications of its own updates or is increasingly prioritizing AI-driven features and advertising over traditional organic search results.²⁰

The most recurring and impactful theme is "**The Great Decoupling**". This refers to the observed trend where impressions for a website's content may rise, but the actual clicks and resulting traffic significantly decline. This phenomenon is largely attributed to the increasing prominence of AI Overviews (AIOs) directly answering queries in the SERP.² The widespread feeling is that "AIO is killing SEO" ²⁰, leading to concerns about the long-term viability of traditional content monetization models.

Despite the frustrations, there is a growing recognition of a necessary **shift in SEO focus**. Many professionals acknowledge that relying solely on ranking for "blue links" is becoming less effective, necessitating adaptation to AI Overviews and exploration of other traffic sources.²⁰ The consistent advice, even amidst the turmoil, is to remain calm, avoid "knee-jerk" reactions, and steadfastly adhere to Google's core guidelines: focus on helpful, people-first content, build strong E-E-A-T signals, and ensure a positive user experience.³

Observed Traffic and Ranking Fluctuations (Drops, Increases, Volatility)

The community reported diverse and often severe traffic and ranking fluctuations across both updates:

- **March Update:**
 - **Volatility:** Search ranking volatility spiked notably around March 16th and March 26th.²
 - **Drops:** Some webmasters reported drastic traffic reductions, including drops of up to 70%, with "main traffic pages" seemingly "all gone".² Correspondingly, some businesses experienced a -75% drop in profits compared to the previous year.² A reduction in the number of indexed posts

was also observed.²

- **Increases:** Conversely, some major players like Amazon saw sales increase by 50% since the update began.² A few sites also reported slight increases in impressions and traffic.²
- **June Update:**
 - **Volatility:** Ranking volatility for the June core update began to be felt around July 2nd.¹³
 - **Drops:** Reports included a 30% traffic drop on new websites, a "downward SLOPE trend" with traffic dwindling from 5,000 clicks to approximately 500, and websites being "deleted from Discover and News," resulting in "traffic - 0".¹³ Some noted that "traffic has died" and experienced a "huge drop in conversions".¹³
 - **Increases:** Positive reports included some sites seeing traffic increases of 10-20% or even 40-50% compared to the previous week.¹³ Slight improvements in keyword rankings and website traffic were also noted for some clients.¹³

Specific Site Types and Examples Mentioned in Discussions

Community discussions frequently highlighted the performance of specific site types and individual examples:

- **Reddit:** Consistently identified as a "winner" in the March update, gaining significant prominence where other forums experienced declines.⁴ Its user-generated content and community discussions are increasingly valued by Google, particularly for queries seeking authentic human answers.¹⁵
- **Quora/ProBoards:** These forum websites were specifically mentioned as having taken a hit in search visibility, contrasting sharply with Reddit's gains.¹⁶
- **eBay:** Reported to have experienced a downturn in rankings during the March update.²
- **Amazon:** Conversely, Amazon sales were reported to be up by 50% following the March update.²
- **Small Publishers/Businesses:** Many small publishers in Germany reported being "swept away" by the June update, with large publishers dominating their niches.¹³ Small businesses that relied on AI to churn out generic articles or used duplicate

content were particularly impacted.¹⁵

- **University Websites:** The June update significantly affected university websites, with AI Overviews increasingly answering queries like "tuition fees 2025" directly, effectively bypassing university pages and reducing clicks.²² Old, low-quality content and unedited AI-generated program blurbs on these sites were also negatively impacted.²²

Deeper Perspectives on Community Chatter

The collective voice of the SEO community, as expressed in forums and social media, offers crucial perspectives that extend beyond algorithmic mechanics, touching upon the broader implications for the digital ecosystem.

The Growing Divide Between Google's Goals and Publisher Sustainability

The widespread frustration and reports of massive traffic and profit drops² suggest a growing divergence between Google's pursuit of "helpful content" and AI Overviews, and the economic viability of traditional publishers and content creators who rely on organic search traffic. If Google's AI Overviews reduce CTR by 18-64%²³, and sites are losing 70% of traffic or seeing profits plummet by 75%², the current model of content creation for search becomes unsustainable for many.

This "Great Decoupling"²⁰ implies that Google is increasingly consuming and presenting content directly within its search results without adequately compensating creators via direct traffic. This has led some to suggest that the traditional search engine model, based on blue links, is "dying".² This situation points to a future where content creators must either find alternative monetization strategies or fundamentally alter how they engage with search, perhaps by focusing on content that cannot be easily summarized by AI or by cultivating stronger direct audience relationships.⁵

The Evolving Definition of "Authority" and "Helpfulness"

The rise of Reddit and the demotion of many traditional generalist publications ⁴ indicate that Google's algorithms are redefining what constitutes "authority" and "helpfulness." Traditionally, authority was often associated with established brands, journalistic rigor, and comprehensive coverage. However, the recent updates suggest a shift towards valuing authentic, real-time, user-generated discussions (as seen with Reddit's success) and highly specialized, in-depth content from niche experts.²⁹

This implies that "helpfulness" is increasingly tied to direct answers from real people, unique perspectives, or deep expertise within a specific niche, rather than broad, generalist coverage. For content creators, this means a need to either foster genuine community engagement that provides unique value or to double down on hyper-specialized, truly unique content that demonstrates undeniable E-E-A-T, potentially leveraging primary research or distinctive insights.³

The Persistent Challenge of "Recovery"

Google consistently maintains that core updates are not penalties and that there is "no specific fix" for sites that experience declines.⁵ Yet, the SEO community's discussions are replete with searches for "recovery strategies".³ This highlights the ongoing tension between Google's opaque algorithmic changes and webmasters' urgent need for clear, actionable steps to regain lost visibility and traffic.

Google's advice, while fundamentally sound (focus on "helpful content," E-E-A-T), can be challenging to translate into immediate, impactful changes for a site that has lost a significant portion of its traffic. The "recovery" process often involves a long-term commitment to quality improvements, and significant positive shifts might only become evident after subsequent core updates.⁵ This dynamic reinforces the understanding that SEO is a continuous, adaptive process, rather than a series of quick fixes in response to algorithmic shifts.

Table 4: SEO Community Observations: Traffic & Ranking Impacts

This table summarizes the qualitative and quantitative observations from SEO forums and community discussions regarding the traffic and ranking impacts of the March and June 2025 Google updates. It captures the real-world consequences and prevailing sentiment among webmasters.

Update	Observed Impact (Drops)	Observed Impact (Increases)	Specific Site Types/Examples	Sentiment/Key Phrases	Source Snippets
March 2025	Indexed posts reduced, -70% traffic, -75% profits, main traffic pages "all gone," eBay down, shop sales dropped (only bots from Google)	Amazon sales +50%, some slight increases in impressions/traffic	Reddit (winner), Quora/ProBoards (hit), eBay (down), Amazon (up)	"Biggest drop since Panda," "traditional search engines with blue links are dying"	2
June 2025	-30% new site traffic, "downward SLOPE trend" (5k to 500 clicks), Discover/News visibility gone, "traffic has died," "huge drop in conversions," "small publishers swept away," university	Some sites up 10-20% or 40-50% week-over-week, slight improvement for some clients	Reddit (winner), small publishers/businesses (swept away), university sites (AIO bypass)	"Total scam," "BS," "AIO is killing SEO," "Artificial Infringement Overviews," "Google doesn't understand what it's doing"	13

	sites bypassed by AIO				
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VI. Strategic Recommendations for Recovery and Future-Proofing

Navigating the post-March and June 2025 Google update landscape requires a strategic, long-term approach focused on foundational SEO principles and adaptation to new search paradigms. The following recommendations are crucial for recovery and future-proofing digital presence.

Prioritizing Helpful, People-First Content and E-E-A-T

Google consistently emphasizes the creation of "helpful, reliable, people-first content".³ This fundamental principle means content should be crafted specifically for the target audience, addressing their needs, validating their concerns, and offering practical solutions.³

A critical component of this is the enhancement of E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) signals.³ Practical steps include:

- **Author Credentials:** Add clear author bios with relevant credentials to all content, demonstrating who created the content and why they are qualified.³
- **Reputable Sourcing:** Cite reputable third-party sources such as government (.gov), educational (.edu) institutions, or recognized industry leaders to back claims and provide context.³
- **Trust Signals:** Incorporate testimonials, case studies, client logos, reviews, and trust badges to build social proof and credibility.³
- **Transparency:** Ensure clear "About Us" and "Contact" pages, privacy policies, and transparent business details are easily accessible.³
- **Human Oversight for AI:** For any AI-assisted content, ensure heavy editing and the addition of significant human expertise. The focus must be on originality,

depth, and value-add, actively avoiding generic or repetitive AI output.¹⁵

Conducting Comprehensive Content Audits (Identify, Refresh, Consolidate, Remove)

A systematic approach to content is vital. Begin by conducting a comprehensive content audit to identify underperforming pages and areas for improvement.

- **Identify Problem Pages:** Utilize Google Search Console and other analytics tools to pinpoint pages that have experienced significant traffic or ranking drops.³ Look for patterns in these shifts, such as drops for specific keyword types or content categories.
- **Refresh/Update Content:** Update outdated information, add more in-depth detail, incorporate original research, or infuse new insights into existing content.³ For evergreen content, yearly refreshes with new statistics or links to the latest industry reports can signal continued relevance.³⁹
- **Consolidate/Remove Low-Value Content:** Aggressively remove or revamp thin pages, empty tag or category pages, doorway pages, or "zombie" posts that offer little value.³ Consider consolidating multiple similar or fragmented articles into single, comprehensive guides to create more substantial and authoritative resources.³ The principle here is that quality consistently outweighs quantity.⁵
- **Avoid AI for Mass Production:** It is crucial to avoid using AI tools to churn out generic articles or duplicate content at scale, as this directly violates Google's spam policies and risks severe penalties.⁶

Enhancing User Experience and Technical SEO

While content quality is paramount, a strong user experience (UX) and solid technical SEO foundations are crucial for ensuring content can be discovered, consumed, and appreciated by both users and search engines.

- **Page Experience:** Ensure fast loading times across all devices, particularly mobile responsiveness, and a clear, intuitive navigation structure.³ Actively avoid intrusive pop-ups, aggressive advertising, or any design elements that detract

from the user's ability to access and engage with the main content.³

- **Technical Health:** Regularly check Google Search Console for any manual actions, crawlability issues, or indexing problems.³ Optimize internal linking structures to ensure related content is well-connected and easily discoverable by both users and crawlers.⁵ Ensure proper use of headings, structured data markup, and maintain a secure website with HTTPS.³

Building Authentic Authority and Diversifying Traffic Sources

In an evolving search landscape, building genuine authority and reducing sole reliance on Google organic search are increasingly critical for long-term stability.

- **Backlink Profile:** Focus on acquiring high-quality, natural backlinks from authoritative and relevant websites through ethical means such as guest posts, public relations efforts, and the creation of highly linkable assets.³ Conduct regular backlink audits to identify and disavow any spammy or toxic domains that might negatively impact your site's reputation.³
- **Brand Mentions:** Actively work to increase brand mentions across the internet, including on other reputable websites, social media platforms, and relevant forums.³⁰ These unlinked mentions contribute to perceived authority and trustworthiness.
- **Diversify Traffic:** A fundamental shift in strategy is to avoid relying solely on Google organic search for traffic.⁵ Develop and nurture other traffic streams such as email lists, social media channels, and direct or referral traffic.⁵ Having a diversified traffic portfolio can significantly cushion the blow of future algorithm updates and reduce vulnerability.⁵
- **Optimize for AI Overviews (Strategically):** While AI Overviews can reduce direct clicks, it is still beneficial to optimize content for inclusion in them. This involves creating content that supports decision-making, tracks shifting seasonal interest, and is entity-driven.²³ Utilize clear H2/H3 headings with direct questions and implement FAQ schema to increase the likelihood of your content being featured in AI-generated answers.²²

VII. Conclusion

The Google March and June 2025 updates represent a significant inflection point in the evolution of search. They underscore a relentless drive by Google towards surfacing high-quality, helpful, and trustworthy content, with an intensified emphasis on E-E-A-T principles. The key message is clear: the era of manipulative SEO tactics and low-effort, mass-produced content is rapidly drawing to a close.

A pivotal finding is that while AI-generated content is not inherently penalized, its use *at scale* without substantial human oversight, originality, or genuine value-add is a confirmed target for demotion. This is explicitly addressed by new spam policies like "Scaled Content Abuse" and reinforced through the evolving Google Quality Rater Guidelines. This means that content creators must view AI as an assistive tool to enhance human expertise, not a replacement for it.

Furthermore, the rise of AI Overviews is fundamentally altering the search landscape. The observed "Great Decoupling" of impressions and clicks poses significant challenges to traditional content monetization models that rely heavily on direct organic traffic. This necessitates a re-evaluation of SEO success metrics and a strategic shift in how content delivers value and attracts engagement.

Discussions within SEO forums reflect widespread volatility and traffic losses for many, but also highlight the success of authentic, user-generated content platforms like Reddit, which Google now appears to value for their genuine community insights. This indicates an evolving definition of "authority" and "helpfulness" in search.

Forward-Looking Advice for Adapting to Google's Continuous Algorithmic Shifts:

The future of SEO demands a profound shift from tactical "tricks" and short-term gains to a holistic, user-centric content strategy. Content creators must prioritize genuine value, deep expertise, and a superior user experience across all digital touchpoints. Responsible integration of AI tools, where AI assists human creativity and authority, will be key to producing content that meets Google's increasingly stringent quality standards. Crucially, diversifying traffic sources beyond sole reliance on Google organic search and actively adapting to the "zero-click" reality of AI Overviews are paramount for long-term sustainability. Patience, continuous monitoring of performance, and an unwavering commitment to Google's core principles of helpfulness and reliability will be the foundational pillars for navigating

and thriving within the ever-evolving search ecosystem.

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