

Google's March 2025 Core Update – Impact on UK Outdoor Leisure Industry

Overview of the March 2025 Core Update

Google released its **March 2025 broad core update** in mid-March, marking the first such update of 2025 (<u>Google algorithm updates: The complete history</u>).

As with any broad core algorithm change, **sites across all industries experienced ranking volatility.**

Many saw noticeable fluctuations in search visibility during the rollout (which Google said could take up to two weeks) (Google Begins Rolling Out March Core Algorithm Update).

Core updates involve **comprehensive changes to Google's search algorithms**, meaning no specific "fix" for a drop; instead, Google aims to *"better surface relevant, satisfying content*" for users with these updates (<u>Google Begins Rolling Out March Core Algorithm</u> Update) (Google Begins Rolling Out March Core Algorithm Update).

In fact, Google has emphasised that if your rankings fell, it doesn't imply a penalty but that **other content is now deemed more relevant** under the new algorithms (<u>Google Begins</u> <u>Rolling Out March Core Algorithm Update</u>).

The March 2025 update follows on the heels of 2024's core updates – notably the massive March 2024 update that Google called its *"biggest core update ever,"* which integrated the Helpful Content system into core ranking signals (Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to 2025 | Impression) (Google algorithm updates: The complete history).

All these point to a continuing **push toward higher content quality and relevance** in search results.

Impact on Outdoor Leisure Brands & Influencers in the UK

Outdoor leisure businesses in the UK – including brands and influencers in hiking, camping, kayaking, cycling, bikepacking, running, etc. – have felt the effects of the March 2025 core update in line with global trends.



Many in this sector rely heavily on content marketing (blog posts, gear reviews, travel guides, etc.) for SEO, and those with **strong, genuinely helpful content have tended to fare better** than those with thin or purely SEO-driven content.

Early analyses and case studies suggest that sites which previously thrived on search-driven content saw mixed fortunes after the update:

- Affiliate-heavy and review sites in the outdoor niche were among the hardest hit. This mirrors the broader pattern in 2024 where Google "significantly lowered the rankings of websites it deemed to be focused more on optimizing for search engines than on providing genuine value to human readers." (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) Many independent gear review blogs, for example, reported traffic drops if their content was deemed "unhelpful" or overly generic. In some cases, smaller niche blogging sites lost visibility to larger, more authoritative sites or to content that demonstrated first-hand expertise. This is consistent with the "blogger carnage" noted after the previous core update, which disproportionately impacted sites that were thin, heavily templated, or written purely for SEO (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). For instance, an outdoor gear review blog that primarily aggregated manufacturer specs with little original insight might see its rankings tumble, while a site with in-depth, experience-based reviews (e.g. a camping expert's long-form review with personal photos and field testing) stands a better chance of holding or improving rankings.
- Established outdoor brands and authoritative publishers have generally seen more stability, and in some cases gains, in search rankings. Google's renewed emphasis on E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) and brand authority means well-known retailers, manufacturers, and high-authority media in the outdoor sector benefited from their credibility signals (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). For example, a recognized UK brand like an outdoor retailer or a national publication's adventure section might outrank lesser-known blogs for queries such as "best hiking boots for Snowdonia 2025," especially if the brand content is comprehensive. Indeed, *"brand recognition [is] playing a more crucial role than ever before"* in rankings post-update (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). This shift has been observed across many niches: Google appears to trust strong brands and expert sources more, which can squeeze out independent bloggers who lack similar authority.
- User-generated content (UGC) and forums have gained prominence for certain outdoor queries. A striking trend from the past year is Google's favoring of **authentic**



user discussion and niche community content in some cases (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX). After the core updates, content like forum threads, Q&A sites, and social discussions (e.g. Reddit posts about hiking routes or camping tips) started ranking higher, sometimes above traditional articles. Analysts noted that Google *"shifted away from traditional review and informational articles... in favor of user-generated content from platforms like Reddit and Quora,"* prioritizing content that likely reflects real user experiences (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX). In the outdoor space, this meant a thread on a mountain biking forum or a StackExchange discussion about kayak maintenance might outrank a generic blog post lacking depth. Businesses and influencers have observed Google rewarding content that shows real-world experience and community trust, which is very relevant in outdoor hobbies where practical know-how and peer insights are valued.

Geo-specific and vehicle-related outdoor sites saw similar patterns. The
 "outdoor leisure vehicle" segment – covering things like campervans, caravans,
 4x4 adventure vehicles, etc. – was not immune. Websites dealing with these vehicles
 needed to offer substantial value to maintain rankings. For example, a UK
 campervan rental company with a blog must provide genuinely useful travel guides or
 campervan tips to rank well; a thin page stuffed with keywords like "best campervan
 UK hire" without depth might drop. On the flip side, a community-driven site about
 motorhome travel (with active user forums or detailed road trip reports) could see
 improvement. Overall, sites that combined product information with authentic
 experience (or user reviews) are performing better than those that were
 essentially catalogues or affiliate link farms. Google is clearly applying the same
 quality bar across the board – whether it's advice on trail running or specs of a new
 kayak model, the content must be helpful, credible, and satisfying to the user's
 query to rank well after this update (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search
 2024 - SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX).

It's worth noting that early data indicated **slightly less ranking turbulence in the UK compared to the US** for some recent core updates (<u>Google algorithm updates: All major</u> <u>changes up to 2025 | Impression</u>). European markets, including the UK, sometimes show a *"less substantial volatility"* in rankings (<u>Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to</u> <u>2025 | Impression</u>). This held true to an extent – major UK outdoor sites did see changes, but the swings were generally not as wild as what some U.S. sites experienced during last year's big update. Still, *within the outdoor sector the direction of change has been the same*: content quality is the dividing line between winners and losers. Companies that saw **losses in organic traffic are those forced to confront issues like thin content, lack of**



originality, slow sites, or an over-reliance on SEO tricks, whereas those that gained tended to have invested in content depth, site experience, and trust signals.

Evolving Ranking Factors & Trends Post-Update

Several **SEO trends have emerged from analyses of the March 2025 core update** that are especially pertinent to outdoor leisure businesses:

- Experience and Authority Matter More Than Ever (E-E-A-T) Google continues to refine how it evaluates a website's expertise and trustworthiness. The update reinforced that sites with demonstrable expertise and firsthand experience are rewarded, while those lacking it may slip. In practice, an outdoor blog where the author is a seasoned hiker or qualified guide (and makes that clear in their bio and content) is likely deemed more authoritative than a content farm churning out "Top 10 tents" lists. Google's algorithmic tweaks are aligning with E-E-A-T principles: one SEO analysis noted the March 2024/25 updates significantly "lowered the rankings of websites...focused more on optimizing for search engines than on providing genuine value" (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 SISTRIX). Conversely, pages that provide unique insights, accurate information, and satisfying answers tend to rise. This also ties into brand credibility well-known organizations or experts inherently carry authority signals. For outdoor businesses, having trusted voices (guides, athletes, experts) contribute content can boost perceived expertise.
- Crackdown on Low-Quality & Al-Generated Content Google has markedly improved at identifying unoriginal or auto-generated content, and the core update furthered this crackdown. The March 2025 update builds on a late 2024 push where Google integrated its Helpful Content system and introduced new spam policies targeting things like "scaled content abuse" (mass-produced pages with little value) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX). The result is a mass removal or demotion of thin, duplicative content across the web. Google even reported roughly a 45% reduction in low-guality, unoriginal content in search results after the prior update (Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to 2025 | Impression). In the outdoor niche, any site that populated its pages with manufacturer descriptions, Al-written paragraphs, or scraped content without adding value would be hit hard. For example, if a kayaking site simply copied specs for kayaks and had Al write brief pros/cons, those pages likely dropped in ranking. One study noted 100% of sites receiving manual actions in the March update had some AI-generated posts (Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to 2025 | Impression).



Originality and human touch are now essential – Google's systems can algorithmically demote content that reads as auto-generated fluff or SEO filler.

- Higher Weight on User Engagement and Satisfaction Although Google doesn't explicitly confirm using on-site engagement metrics as direct ranking factors, the patterns suggest sites that engage users and meet their needs are performing better. SEO experts observed that many of the sites losing out had high bounce rates or low time-on-site, indicating visitors weren't finding them very useful (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). The core update's outcome implies that **Google is indirectly** rewarding positive user experience – content that keeps readers engaged (e.g. through depth, interactivity, or multimedia) and sites that offer good usability (fast load times, mobile-friendly layouts, etc.). In contrast, pages with poor UX signals (slow loading, intrusive pop-ups, disorganized content) saw drops. Within outdoor websites, this could mean a well-structured guide on "hiking the Lake District" that users read in full and maybe scroll through an interactive map will likely rank above a thin 300-word blog post on the same topic that users quickly abandon. In short, Google's algorithmic evaluation has become more "holistic," attempting to gauge the overall value and experience of a page rather than just matching keywords (Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to 2025 | Impression). Factors like mobile performance and Core Web Vitals remain important fundamentals, and the update underscores that they should be paired with excellent content.
- Shift in SERP Landscape Rise of Forums and Community Content A notable trend affecting the outdoor sector is the change in search result composition. Many publishers have reported that Google is favoring forum threads, Reddit Q&As, and other user-generated content in the SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) for informational queries (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 -SISTRIX). For example, a search like "best waterproof jackets for hiking" might now show a Reddit thread or a niche outdoor forum discussion on page one, whereas a year or two ago it might have been dominated by blog reviews and ecommerce category pages. Google's core update appears to be interpreting certain queries as better answered by the wisdom of the crowd or real user experiences. This means outdoor brands must recognize that the competition is no longer just other blogs or retailers – it's also community-driven content. Some savvy businesses are adapting by fostering their own community sections or incorporating more user reviews and testimonials on their pages to harness this trend. The broader message is that content which demonstrates real-life use, diverse opinions, and depth (often characteristics of UGC) is seen as very "helpful" to users, so Google is more willing to rank it highly (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 -SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX).



- "Brand" Signals and Search Presence – Another emerging factor is the strength of a site's brand in Google's eyes. The update reinforced what many SEOs suspected: strong brand presence can buffer against ranking drops. Analysts noted that sites with higher branded search volume or offline reputation tended to fare better amidst core update turbulence (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?) (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). In the outdoor industry, this suggests that a well-known brand (say, a decades-old hiking gear company or a well-established trail guide publisher) had an advantage. Google likely uses implicit signals of trust – for instance, how often users specifically search for "hiking reviews" or how many external reputable sites mention that brand. One report highlighted the *"rise of brand search as a ranking factor"* after recent algorithm changes ([Why Affiliates Losing Website

Ranking?](https://www.pugudigital.io/news/why-are-affiliates-losing-website-ranking/# :~:text=The%20Rise%20of%20Brand%20Search,as%20a%20Ranking%20Factor)). For influencers and smaller businesses, this trend underscores the importance of building a brand identity (not just a collection of keyword-targeted pages). A loyal audience that seeks you out by name, and a reputation in the outdoor community, can translate into better SEO resilience.

In summary, the March 2025 core update continued Google's trajectory of rewarding quality and cracking down on tactics that produced shallow content. The outdoor leisure sector felt these effects clearly: sites that combined expertise, authenticity, and good user experience generally held strong or improved, whereas those leaning on old-school SEO gimmicks or low-effort content saw declines. The "rules" of ranking didn't fundamentally change – rather, Google got *stricter* and more effective at enforcing them. Content truly written for users (and preferably by knowledgeable enthusiasts or professionals) is beating content written just to rank. As one analysis succinctly put it, Google is prioritizing "content that provides genuine value to users over content primarily optimized for search engines," which has been "consistently shared throughout Google's communications in 2024 [and beyond]" (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX). This is a clear directive for outdoor brands moving forward.

SEO Best Practices Post-Update for Outdoor Industry Sites

In light of the update's impact, **experts are advising outdoor businesses and content creators to refocus their SEO strategies around quality and user-centric principles**. Here are some **best practices** emerging post-March 2025 for sites in hiking, camping, cycling, and related niches:



- Audit and Elevate Content Quality: Perform a thorough content audit to identify pages that may be "unhelpful" or thin. It's crucial to update, expand, or remove low-value content that might be dragging your site down. Google's Helpful Content system now evaluates sites holistically, so a few weak pages can hurt overall rankings. Each article or guide should *provide unique value*: for example, if you have a blog post on "wild camping tips," ensure it contains detailed, firsthand advice rather than a generic rehash of tips found elsewhere. Adding original research, personal experiences, high-quality photos/videos, and up-to-date information can set your content apart. Ask yourself the questions Google has posed in its quality guidelines e.g. "Does this content provide substantial insight and knowledge from an expert or enthusiast?" or "Is it written to help users, not just to attract search engine traffic?". If the answer isn't a confident yes, that page likely needs improvement. Sites that took a hard look at their content and beefed up their E-E-A-T signals (e.g., author bios highlighting outdoor expertise, citing trustworthy sources, including real examples) are seeing better post-update performance.
- Demonstrate Firsthand Experience: Leverage the "Experience" aspect of E-E-A-T by showcasing real experience in your niche. For an outdoor site, this means content should reflect that it's written by someone who has been there and done that. If you're reviewing a mountain bike, include your personal testing notes and photos of you on the trail with that bike. If you run a hiking blog, draw on your own trek logs, and consider embedding maps of routes you've hiked. Google's algorithms, supplemented by human guality raters, look for clues that content comes from a place of genuine experience (and not from a faceless content mill). This is especially important for influencers: your authenticity is your strength. Brands and influencers post-update are making a point to add their voice and story to content. This can be as simple as a short anecdote in a guide ("When I attempted the Three Peaks Challenge last summer, I learned...") or as structured as an "author's experience" section in a product review. These elements can improve user trust and satisfy the search engine's criteria for valuable content. Remember, content that reads as boilerplate or solely aggregated from other sources is exactly what the core update targeted for demotion (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?).
- Improve On-Site User Experience: Beyond content text, site quality and user experience factors need attention. A slow, ad-cluttered site can undermine great content. Many sites hit by the update were noted to have *poor user experience e.g. slow load times, intrusive interstitials, or confusing navigation* (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). As an outdoor brand, your site should be as user-friendly as a well-marked trail. Ensure mobile optimization is top-notch (many adventure-seekers search on mobile while on the go), page speeds are fast, and the layout is clean with



relevant images and headings that make content easy to consume. Be cautious with ads: aggressive ad layouts or pop-ups that frustrate readers can not only drive users away but also send negative quality signals to Google. On the flip side, **engagement features that enhance UX** – such as an interactive packing checklist for campers, a calculator for bike frame size, or even a comments section where readers can ask questions – can increase dwell time and user satisfaction. While Google's core update didn't explicitly target page experience (it's not a replacement for the Page Experience Update), the sites that retained rankings often were those already *following UX best practices*. A good rule: treat your visitors like you would hikers in a campground you manage – guide them clearly, don't annoy them, and help them find what they need easily.

- Avoid Over-Optimization & "Quick Fix" Tactics: In the aftermath of a core update, it's tempting to make hasty SEO changes to try to regain rankings. Experts caution against knee-jerk reactions. Google's own advice after core updates is to "wait a full week before implementing any changes" and avoid wild swings in strategy (Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to 2025 | Impression). Instead of chasing the latest rumor about the algorithm, focus on steady, user-centered improvements. For instance, don't suddenly stuff more keywords like "UK hiking best" all over your page - that will likely hurt more than help. Likewise, adding a bunch of new low-quality pages to target long-tail keywords (or auto-generating content to recover traffic) is a dangerous move; those are the very strategies Google's spam policies (like the scaled content abuse rule) are clamping down on (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX). Stick to SEO fundamentals: good metadata (descriptive titles and meta descriptions), logical URL structures, schema markup for reviews or FAQs where appropriate, and solid internal linking. By all means, optimize your content – but do it in service of clarity and usefulness, not to game the algorithm. A litmus test is, if a change only benefits an SEO metric but doesn't make the page better for a human reader, reconsider it. In this update, many sites that "focused on keyword optimization rather than user intent" got hit hardest (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). Learn from that by ensuring your optimizations align with what a user actually wants from the query.
- Bolster Your Site's Authority & Trust: Given the algorithm's apparent favoritism toward authoritative brands, outdoor businesses should invest in building their authority online. This goes beyond just content it's about your reputation on the web. Earn high-quality backlinks and mentions from reputable sites in the outdoor niche. For example, if your adventure travel company sponsors a well-known mountain race or partners with a conservation charity, see if they'll feature or mention



you on their website (with a link). Such genuine connections can boost your authority signals. Encourage satisfied customers or followers to leave reviews on Google and other platforms; positive sentiment can indirectly support your trustworthiness. Also, ensure your **About and Contact information is thorough** – trust is reinforced when a site is transparent about who runs it, where it's based, and how to get in touch. Influencers should highlight their credentials (years of experience, notable expeditions, any certifications like mountain leader awards or first aid training) to reinforce expertise. In the post-update environment, some webmasters speculate that Google even gauges **brand strength by search behavior** (like how many people search your brand name plus keywords) (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?). While you can't directly control users' search habits, you *can* raise brand awareness through social media, newsletters, and community engagement – which in turn might lead to more branded searches. The bottom line: **cultivate a brand that people trust and seek out**, and the algorithm is more likely to favor you.

- Leverage User-Generated Content (Carefully): Since we see Google rewarding user-driven content, consider ways to incorporate UGC on your own site. This could mean adding a forum or Q&A section to your website where outdoor enthusiasts can contribute (if it makes sense for your business model), or simply featuring curated user tips/testimonials in your articles. For example, a trail-running gear site might include a section in each shoe review like "Runner Community Feedback" with quotes from real users. However, implement this carefully user content still needs moderation for quality. The goal is to blend expert content with authentic voices, giving the best of both worlds. If you cultivate a community, enforce guidelines so that the content remains useful and on-topic (to avoid your site generating "spam" in Google's eyes). When done right, having an active user comment section or forum can increase fresh content on your pages and demonstrate that your site serves as a hub of knowledgeable enthusiasts, which can be a positive signal.
- Monitor Performance & Learn from Data: Finally, continuously track your SEO performance (rankings, click-through rates, traffic patterns) in the weeks and months after the update. Look for patterns: Did certain types of pages drop more than others? (e.g. product review pages vs. informational guides). Are competitors who rose doing something notably different? Use tools like Google Search Console and analytics to pinpoint where changes occurred. For example, if you notice your articles about "beginner hiking tips" dipped but "advanced alpine guides" went up, it could hint that the beginner content was seen as too basic or duplicate of others an opportunity to improve it with more unique insights. Case studies from others in the industry can be instructive too. SEO communities and forums (including those focused on travel and outdoors) have been buzzing with examples of what worked or



didn't after the update. Learn from these shared experiences, but always verify against your own site's data before taking action. And remember Google's advice: *focus on content improvements for users, not algorithm chasing* (Google Begins Rolling Out March Core Algorithm Update). Recovery from core updates is often slow and steady; implementing genuine enhancements to your site can take weeks to be re-crawled and re-evaluated. Patience and consistency are key.

Key Takeaways 📌

- Quality Over Keywords: The March 2025 core update reinforced that high-quality, genuinely helpful content trumps content written just to rank. Outdoor sites with original, in-depth content (often reflecting real experience) saw better outcomes, while thin or duplicative pages lost groun (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 SISTRIX)]. Focus on creating content that serves the reader's needs answer their questions, solve their problems, and share first-hand insights.
- E-E-A-T and Brand Authority Are Critical: Google is increasingly favoring authoritative sources. Brands and influencers in the outdoor niche who have established expertise and trust (strong reputations, credentials, positive user recognition) were more resilient. Smaller sites that lacked authority or whose content quality was inconsistent were more vulnerable to ranking drop (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 SISTRIX)
 Investing in your site's expertise, author transparency, and overall trust signals isn't optional it's a must for SEO post-update.
- User Experience & Engagement Influence Success: Great content won't shine if the user experience is poor. The update coincided with demotions for sites with slow speeds, poor mobile design, or aggressive ads, suggesting that user satisfaction metrics play a rol (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?) (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?)]. Outdoor businesses should ensure their websites are fast, easy to navigate, and provide a pleasant reading experience. Engaging features (like community forums or interactive tools) can also keep users on your site longer, which correlates with better rankings.
- UGC & Community Content Demand Attention: Google's results are now often populated with forum threads and community-driven answers, indicating that for many queries, the collective voice of users is considered highly valuabl (<u>IndexWatch:</u> <u>SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX</u>)]. This trend means outdoor brands should not ignore the content on platforms like Reddit, TripAdvisor, or



specialized forums – it's both a competitor and an inspiration. Consider fostering your own community or at least integrating authentic user perspectives into your content. The more your site can be a one-stop resource (expert advice + user tips), the better it may perform.

Post-Update Recovery = User-Centric Improvements: If your site was hit, don't reach for quick SEO hacks – they won't work. Google explicitly advises focusing on making your site better for users rather than chasing algorithm loophole (Google algorithm updates: All major changes up to 2025 | Impression)]. Perform honest evaluations of where your content falls short. Improve E-E-A-T, update outdated info, remove low-value pages, and polish your site's usability. Importantly, be patient: core update recoveries often take time (sometimes not until the next core update). By systematically enhancing your site's content and experience now, you position yourself to regain and even surpass your former rankings in the long run. In essence, *"staying adaptable is key"* – those who adapt by aligning with Google's quality standards will thriv (What's the situation after march core update? - SEO - Reddit)].

Sources: Google & SEO industry announcements and analyses were referenced, including Google's own core update guidance and expert commentary from Search Engine Land, Search Engine Journal, Sistrix (Lily Ray), and others. These sources highlight the update's effects and recommended responses, as cited throughou (Google Begins Rolling Out March Core Algorithm Update) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) (IndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) (UndexWatch: SEO Losers in Google US Search 2024 - SISTRIX) (Why Affiliates Losing Website Ranking?)].