

OuterBox[®]



Industry Playbook:

The OuterBox Guide to Google's Core Updates

Google's core updates can shake up your rankings, but a proactive strategy can reduce risk. This guide shows how to audit affected pages, align content with user intent, and stabilize search visibility—now and in the future.



Better Results with Less Disruption.

When Google performs an update or introduces a new feature, it aims to improve the user experience. The most consistent changes are large “core” updates that target spam, optimize the algorithms operating in the background, and [theoretically] ensure helpful content ranks high. These usually occur at least four to five times a year.

While the updates roll out, they can shuffle results by improving or worsening your rankings, potentially disrupting performance over several weeks.

As strategic partners, the experts at OuterBox understand that any loss of SERP placement could mean potential revenue loss for your business. Protecting your revenue means staying in control—by preventing issues or recovering fast, you stay beholden to your business goals, not Google’s timeline.

This guide will arm your business to respond effectively to core updates and similar algorithm changes, ensuring quick recovery and improving your SEO strategy to withstand future updates for better results and less disruption to your bottom line.

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“We take a structured approach to monitoring, learning, and acting during updates and feature changes like these—making sure to aggregate findings across the businesses we work with to speed up our impact.”

– **Jeff Allen**, OuterBox CEO



While Google rarely provides specifics, these updates signal a shift in what the algorithm values.

Your job is to understand how those values have changed—and adjust your SEO strategy accordingly.

What is a Core Update?

SEO is never a one-and-done thing. Google performs maintenance on its algorithms 'round the clock so that organic search results better match user intent. However, core updates cause more impactful changes. **They are major system-wide changes that impact how pages are evaluated and ranked, often reshuffling the search landscape in noticeable ways.**

Let's break down how a core update differs from other algorithm adjustments:

- **Feature Updates:** Introduce new elements into the search results, such as AI Overviews (May 2024) or visual product carousels. These may indirectly affect organic visibility by changing how results are displayed.
- **Spam Updates:** Target sites that violate [Google's spam policies](#). These typically remove or demote low-quality or manipulative content.
- **Helpful Content Updates:** Once separate, these were integrated into core updates in 2024. Both look to improve Google's [E-E-A-T framework](#) (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness), prioritizing helpful and reliable content.
- **Core Updates:** Broad, foundational updates that improve Google's systems, often affecting ranking signals, how intent is interpreted, and how content is evaluated across the web. Most changes occur at the page level, not site-wide—unless otherwise specified.

Google Core Updates Timeline: 2020 to Present

2020

1. January
2. May
3. December

2021

1. May
2. November

2022

1. May (AIO)*
2. September
3. November
4. December

2023

1. March
2. August
3. Sept. (HC)*
4. October
5. November
6. Dec. (HC)*

2024

1. March
2. May
3. August

2025

1. March
2. June
3. ???

* HC = Helpful Content AIO = AI Overview

Core Update Rollouts

Timing matters—and context is everything.

Before blaming a performance dip on Google, zoom out. Algorithm updates are just one piece of the puzzle. Fluctuations can also stem from changes to your site, shifting competition, seasonal behavior, or even a recent trade show or email campaign.

That said, when a core update is in play, it's critical to understand when and how it rolls out.

These updates usually launch in the spring and fall, often in March and again near September or November. They typically take up to two weeks to fully roll out, but their impact can ripple out for weeks after.

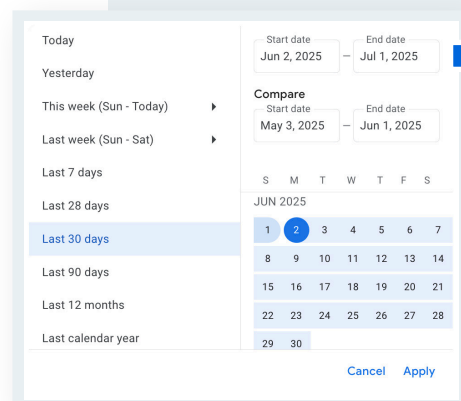
Google Core Update

To Confirm if an Update is the Cause:

- Check the [official update timeline](#) from Google Search Central
- Compare performance windows before, during, and after the suspected rollout
- Consult with your OuterBox team members to separate coincidence from correlation

PRO TIP!

Don't rely on day-to-day analytics. Use a **month-over-month** or **4-week comparison** to get meaningful trend insights.



What Do Real SEOs Say?

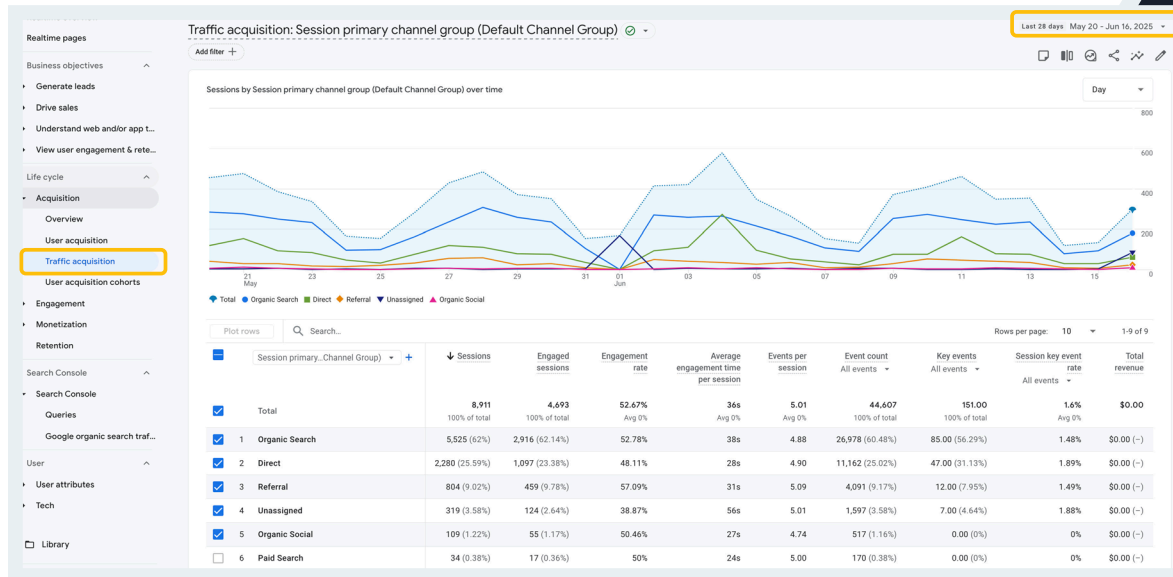


"I tell my clients that, more often than not, we will experience a yo-yo effect: things shift around but then level off a few weeks after the update. Monitor, assess the positive or negative impact, and adjust the strategy accordingly"

– **Colin Gacek**,
OuterBox Lead SEO
Essentials Strategist

Dive Deeper Into Your Analytics

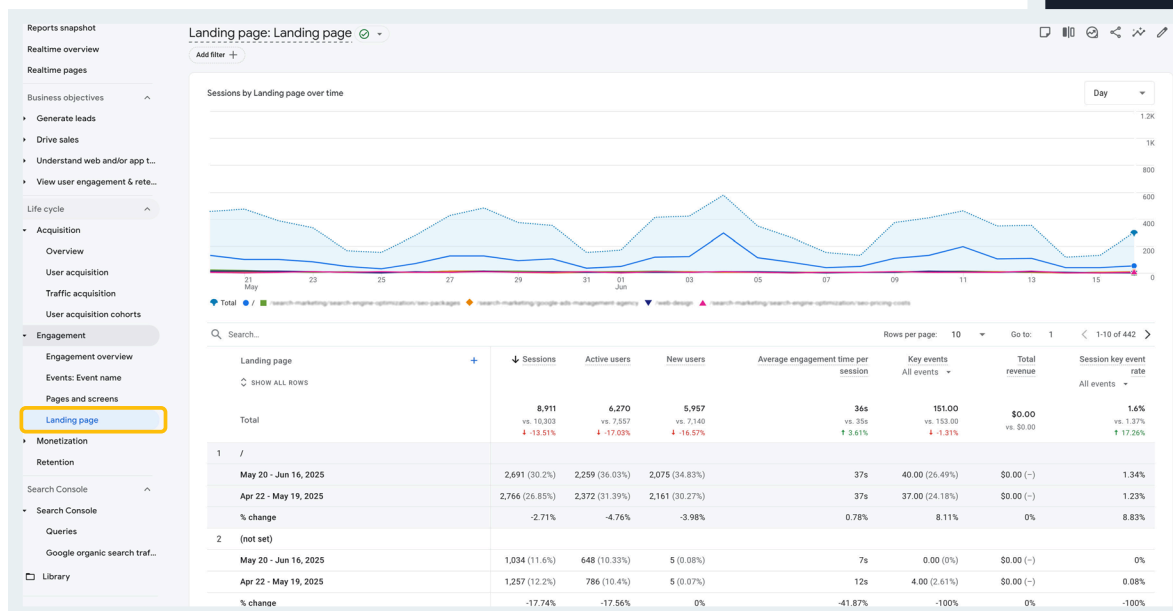
To determine if rankings were affected for relevant queries, we recommend starting in GA4 and reviewing organic traffic trends using a date range that includes at least two weeks before and after the update.



Go to Acquisition > Traffic Acquisition, then customize the date range using the compare feature.

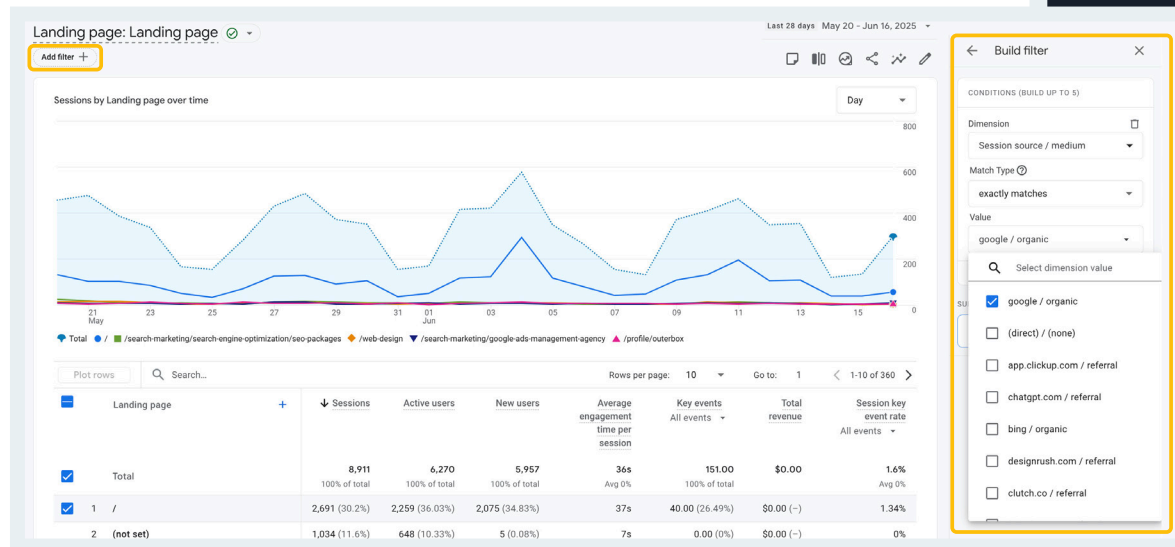
Now it's question time.

Are the drops sitewide, or can they be drilled down to a specific page or two?
To determine this, narrow in on Landing Pages and compare a date range.



Go to Engagement > Landing Page and customize the date range using the compare feature.

In this view, you'll need to filter out organic sources by clicking the "Add a Filter" button under "Landing Page" at the top. Select "Session Source/medium" and "exactly matches" to filter by organic results.

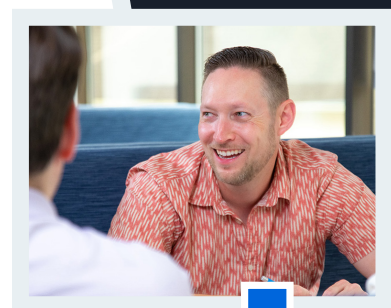


In this filter, you can review organic traffic from multiple sources.

Generally, if your website is affected by an update, you will likely see a traffic increase or decrease on key landing pages. You can better understand where you rank for specific keywords in the full version of Google Search Console or via tools like Accuranker and Advanced Web Ranking.

Ensure you understand all circumstances related to your data time frame, such as trade shows, significant content changes, weekends and holidays, or macroeconomic changes. GA4 now has annotations, allowing you to add notes directly to reports to keep track and add context to changes in your data.

TIP:
There's a search bar above the landing page listing to search for specific pages.



Looking at the Cause

If you see a negative trend in your data after a core update, it doesn't mean your website was penalized. It may be because previously under-recognized websites are rising, or your competitors made changes that the updated algorithm favors.

What do OuterBox, Coalition Technologies, Victorious Marketing, and Ignite's visibility have in common on their website content to help them rank organically?

OuterBox, Coalition Technologies, Victorious SEO (Victorious Marketing), and Ignite Visibility all share several strategic website content practices that contribute to strong organic search rankings. Here's what they have in common:

✓ 1. Extensive and Strategic Use of Service Pages

- They all have **dedicated SEO landing pages** for each core service, vertical, and niche (e.g., "eCommerce SEO," "Enterprise SEO," "Local SEO").
- These pages are optimized with targeted keywords and often include internal links, case studies, and CTAs to convert traffic.

✓ 2. Industry-Specific Content

- Each agency creates pages tailored to specific industries or platforms, like:
 - "SEO for Shopify," "Magento SEO," "SEO for Healthcare"
- This helps them rank for long-tail, high-intent search queries.

✓ 3. Content Hubs & Pillar Pages

- They use **pillar content models**, where a comprehensive guide links to and from smaller, related blog

Ask an LLM like ChatGPT to compare the content and visibility of competitors.

To determine this, head to the landscape. **Search in Google as your ideal customer would.** Make notes on what's changed and who ranks above you.

Question time:

- Any changes from the last time you viewed this query?
- What are businesses ranking higher doing differently from you?
- What changes added quality to competitors' sites that the algorithm may be rewarding?

TIP: Incognito mode stops the browser from using stored data to personalize search results, circumventing your cookies and browsing history to get an unbiased view.

You can also utilize AI tools like ChatGPT to compare pages. Plug the top-ranking competitors into the tool and prompt it to identify trends in their content.

Now Ask Yourself:

What zero-click results, like AI overviews and snippets, show above your organic results? Your solution may be structuring your content for these results or considering changes in your paid media.

If you see mixed results that do not adjust over time, the next step is to evaluate the content of the impacted landing pages. Compare your pages to those ranking above you, including keywords, keyword variations, overall content strategy, and elements like FAQs, videos, and bulleted lists.

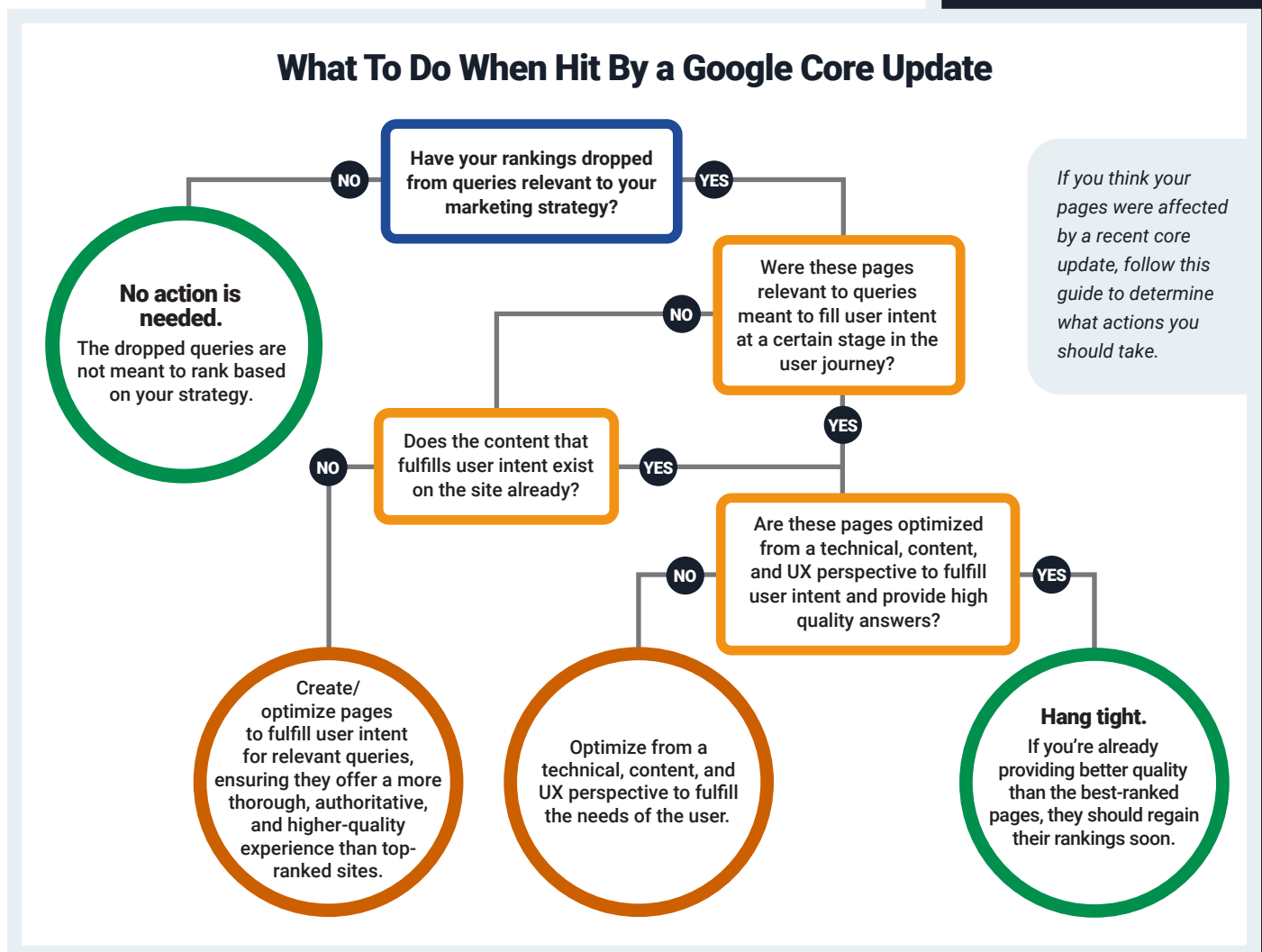
The biggest question yet: Are the pages affected relevant to your marketing ROI? A product or services page will need a swifter response than your About Us page.

Focus on Relevant Queries

You've seen the data and search landscape, combining the buyer's view with results. You've sized up the competition, and the search features standing in your way.

With the full picture, let's talk optimizations (if any). To answer this, ask yourself if the rankings dropped from relevant queries. Relevant, in this case, means queries that bring your business value—product and service pages. If rankings drop for a page that never brought in leads, turn your response to the pages that do. While we aren't calling authoritative informational content irrelevant, we suggest prioritizing pages that generate revenue first.

Here's a chart that can help guide your response to a rankings drop in the aftermath of a core update:



Does your path on this chart require action? Let's explore your next steps.

flowchart: www.aleydasolis.com

Methodologies for Optimizations

If optimization or net-new content is needed, keep the tenets of Google's Helpful Content in mind and the acronym E-E-A-T:

- Experience
- Expertise
- Authoritativeness
- Trustworthiness

This framework helps the algorithm evaluate the credibility and relevance of websites and can be used to your advantage when creating content.

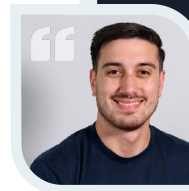


OuterBox's B-SMART Method® offers an additional framework that takes these same ideas and applies them through a business lens. It considers business goals and applies them to website content by taking quality over quantity into consideration. This method targets buyers further down the funnel by:

- Employing user intent
- Using lead data
- Reviewing the search landscape

B-SMART ensures your landing pages answer user intent by answering prospective buyers' questions.

Using both E-E-A-T and B-SMART methodologies highlights what content you need to add or optimize. To target where to add content, keep user experience in mind, and avoid keyword stuffing. The likely spots for these are places like title tags, headlines, and meta descriptions. The OuterBox team is here to help with content and technical optimizations to help your high-priority product and service pages continue to drive sales even during core updates.



"Even our own agency site isn't immune to the chaos of a core update."

What matters is how quickly you can identify impact, cut through the noise, and respond with strategy—not guesswork."

– Sal Comisso

OuterBox Division Director
of SEO & UX Services





Additional Tips to Maintain Search Visibility

Still noticing a dip in performance site-wide, but no algorithm update aligns with your timeframe? Here are some additional tips not only for dips but for maintaining overall search visibility.

Audit Your Backlink Profile

Check Google Search Console or your favorite backlink tool for any red flags—spammy links, sudden drops, or broken high-authority links. A strong, trustworthy backlink profile is a core ranking signal.

Optimize for Zero-Click SERPs

Featured snippets, AI Overviews, People Also Ask—these elements push traditional organic results down the page. Structure your content with concise answers, schema markup, and scannable formatting to increase your chances of earning visibility in these spots.

New Search Channels

Google recently received the lowest share of the search market in 20 years. It's still a strong 83.54%, but the dip is proof of the shifting landscape.

Here's who's dipping into Google's share:

- 6.79% YouTube
- 4.33% ChatGPT
- 3.37% Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit, Pinterest, and Perplexity combined
- 1.97% Bing

Creating content for these channels can help your business' search visibility during algorithm updates and major changes in user behavior.

Google is Not the Enemy

"One of our core values is Partnership, which is never more important than in times of major updates. Often, these updates create as many opportunities as they do risks, and we roll up our sleeves alongside our clients to exploit the good and mitigate the downside."

— **Jeff Allen**, OuterBox CEO



As Google continues refining its search platform through core updates and new AI features, businesses must closely monitor how these changes influence their digital presence. These updates are not punitive, but rather are maintenance measures meant to improve the search experience by prioritizing credible, relevant, and user-focused content.

With so much at stake (the success of your business) and so many variables outside algorithm updates (like competitors and AI), it's essential to be proactive about your SEO performance. By partnering with experts like OuterBox, businesses can maintain stability, adapt confidently, and strengthen long-term search visibility.

OuterBox - Industry Playbook

Google Core Update Checklist:

- ☐ Track Update Rollouts
- ☐ Analyze Traffic Drops
- ☐ Research Competitors
- ☐ Prioritize Key Pages
- ☐ Optimize Content Thoroughly
- ☐ Diversify Search Opportunities

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