Q1 2025 Ad Quality Report

Ad Quality and Malvertising Trends

GeoEdge's Ad Quality Report examines the prevalence and origins of malvertising attacks on global devices across programmatic advertising channels. Here's how AdTech fared in Q1 2025:

- **Malicious extensions and add-ons stormed mobile screens, now the second most common attack vector.**

- **Floating ads doubled in volume, emerging as the top disruptive UX threat of the quarter.**

- **Redirects continue to be the quickest path to profit for attackers, making up 68% of all malicious campaigns, with mobile users as the primary target.**
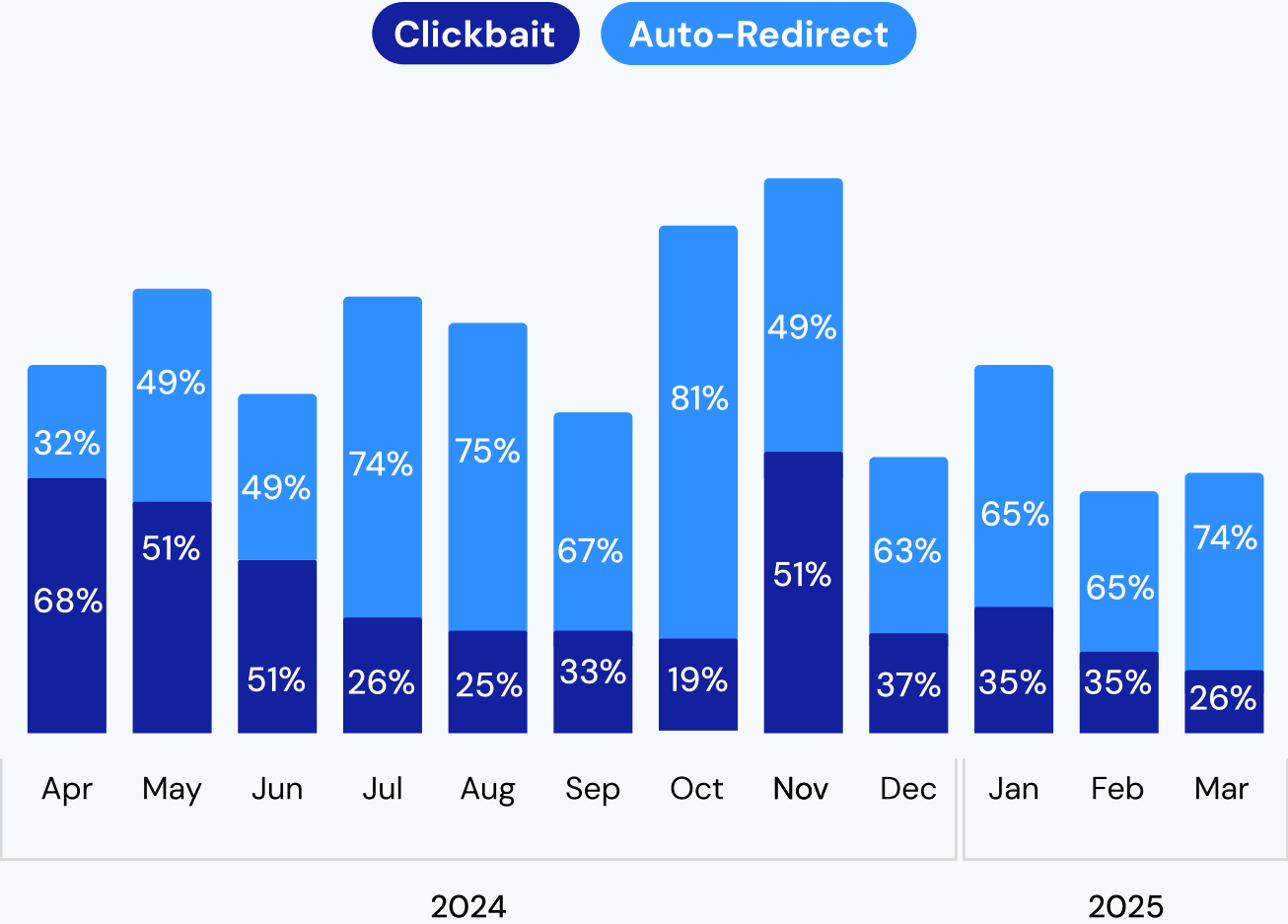
GeoEdge monitored and analyzed billions of advertising impressions across premium websites, apps, and SSPs to compile the research presented in this report. The data was collected using GeoEdge's real-time ad security solution, which assesses ad quality and malvertising blocking on live impressions across devices and channels.

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Malvertising Trends Q4 2024

In Q1, auto-redirects surged, **driving 68% of all malicious ad activity**, with mobile environments taking the hardest hit. Despite a slight decline in overall malvertising volume, redirect activity intensified, cementing its role as the top monetization threat this quarter. **Auto-redirects continue to pose the highest risk to publishers**—each attack hijacks user sessions in real time, steering traffic away from intended content.

65% of users now warn friends about **unsafe sites** after ruin-ins with bad ads.

Malicious Advertising: Auto Redirect Vs Clickbait Scams

Clickbait **Auto-Redirect**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Auto-Redirect	32%	49%	49%	74%	75%	67%	81%	49%	63%	65%	65%	74%
Clickbait	68%	51%	51%	26%	25%	33%	19%	51%	37%	35%	35%	26%

2024   2025

The New Malvertising Frontier: Malicious Browser Extensions & Add-ons

Q1 2025 saw a shift in the threat landscape. While most clickbait threat categories declined, **malicious browser extensions and add-ons** quietly climbed the ranks of malvertising, particularly targeting mobile users across the US, Spain, and Italy. **Malicious extensions and add-ons rose sharply—from 9% to 19%. Auto-redirects remained the dominant threat**, though dipped slightly from 56% to 48%. While other threats declined or remained flat, malicious extensions and add-ons emerged as the fastest-growing risk in early 2025.
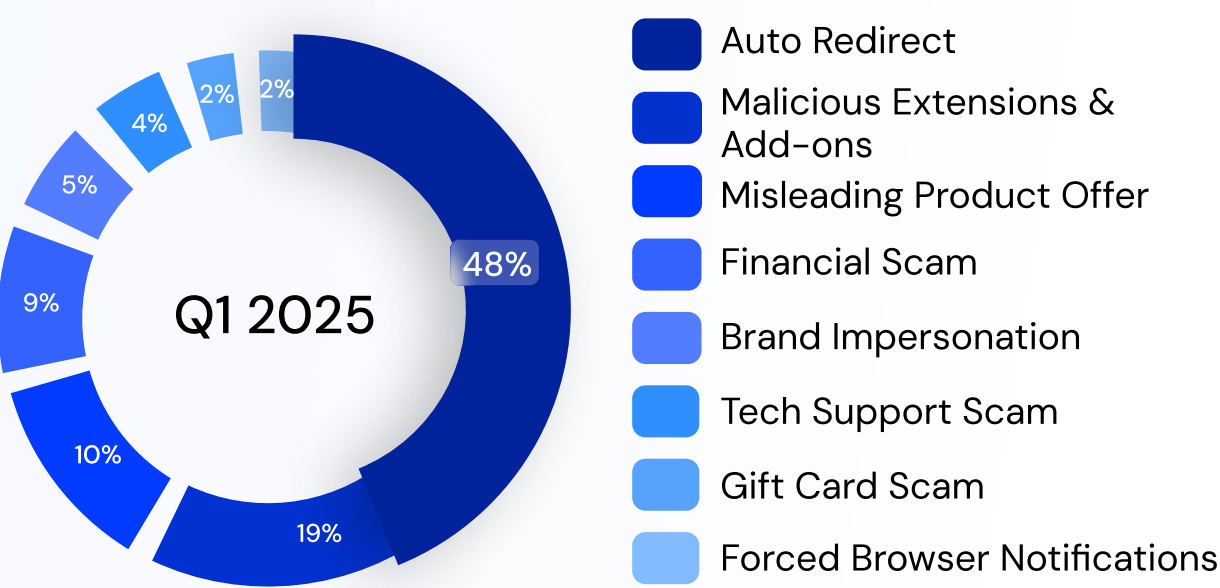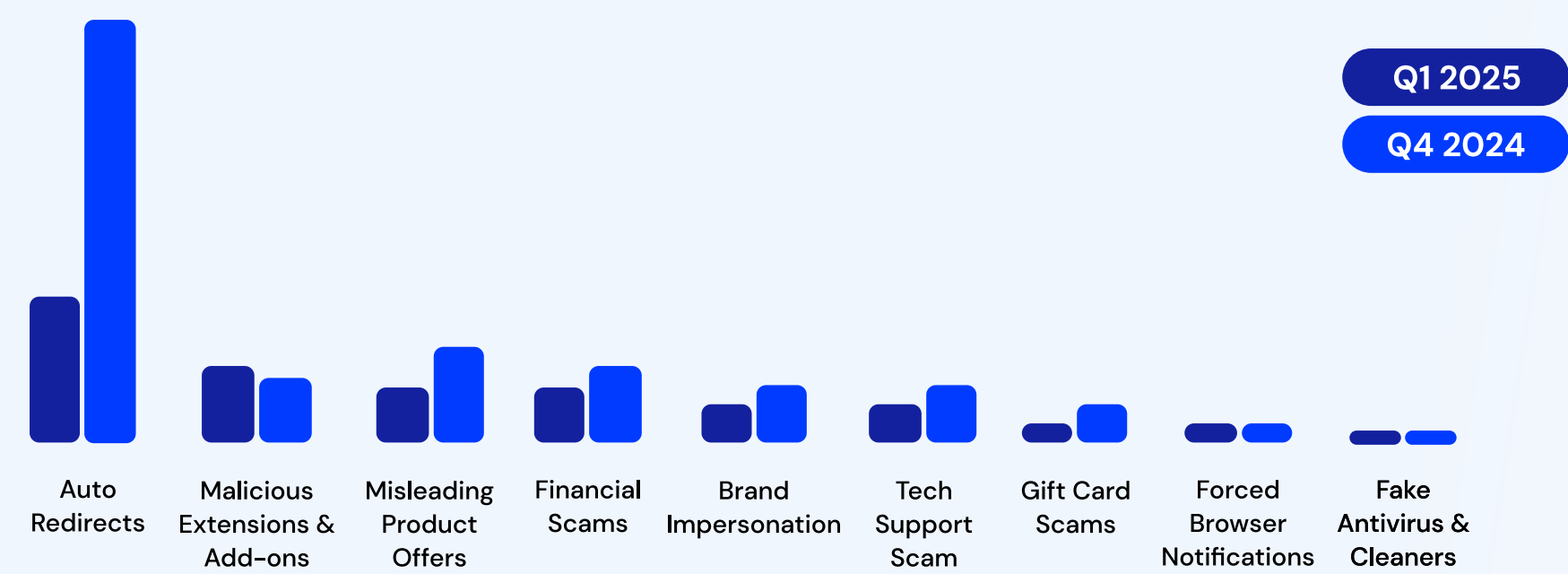
Top 3 Attack Methods in Q1

- Auto-Redirects
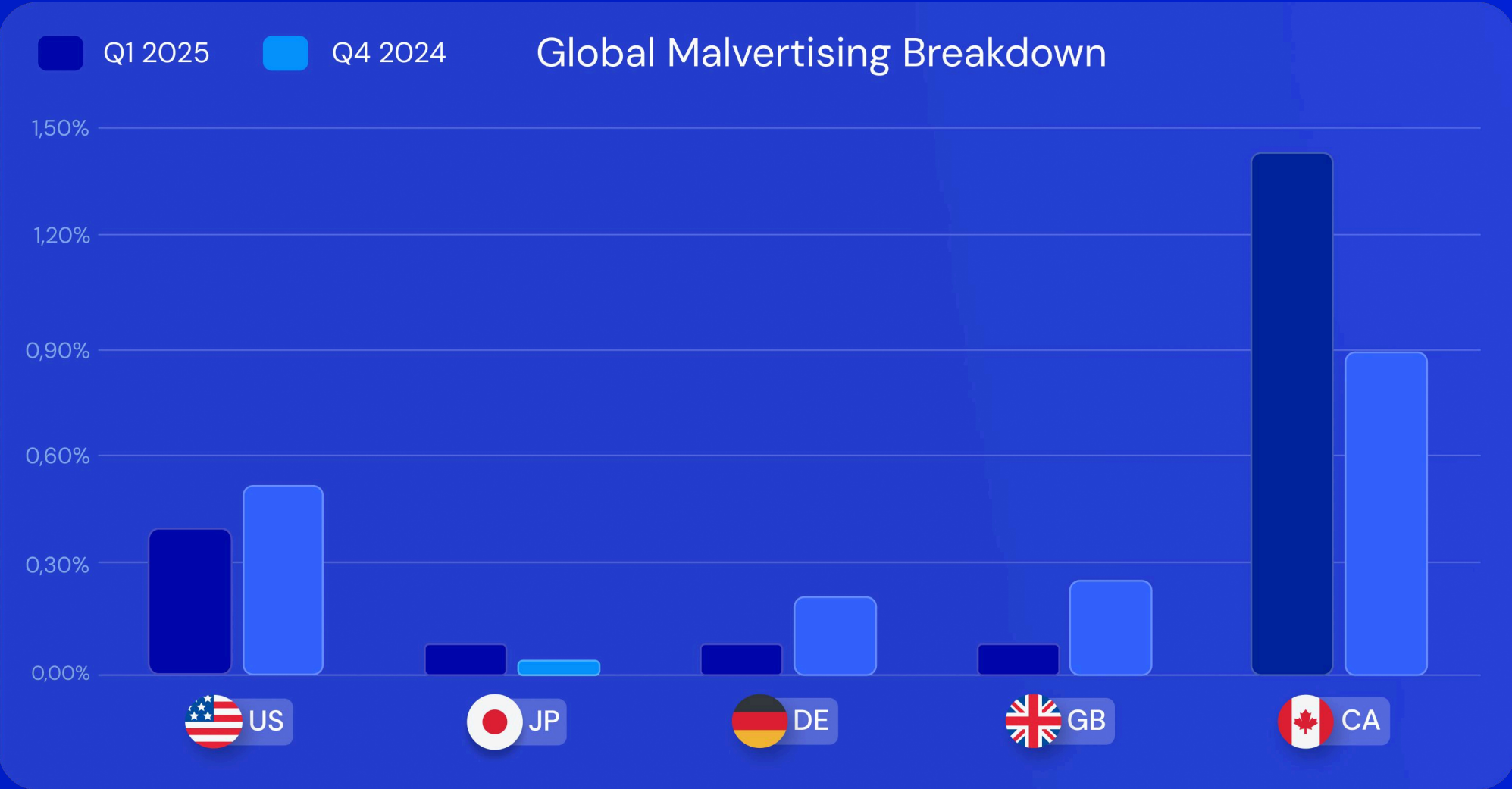- Malicious Extensions & Add-ons
- Misleading Product Offers

Q1 2025 vs. Q4 2024 Malvertising Vector Comparison

Q1 2025
Q4 2024

Auto Redirects | Malicious Extensions & Add-ons | Misleading Product Offers | Financial Scams | Brand Impersonation | Tech Support Scam | Gift Card Scams | Forced Browser Notifications | Fake Antivirus & Cleaners

Malvertising Vectors Q1 2025

- Auto Redirect — 48%
- Malicious Extensions & Add-ons — 19%
- Misleading Product Offer — 10%
- Financial Scam — 9%
- Brand Impersonation — 5%
- Tech Support Scam — 4%
- Gift Card Scam — 2%
- Forced Browser Notifications — 2%

Global Malvertising Threatscape: Q1's Regional Flashpoints

Global Malvertising Breakdown

■ Q1 2025   ■ Q4 2024

	US	JP	DE	GB	CA

Y-axis: 1,50% / 1,20% / 0,90% / 0,60% / 0,30% / 0,00%

Malicious Ad Frequency

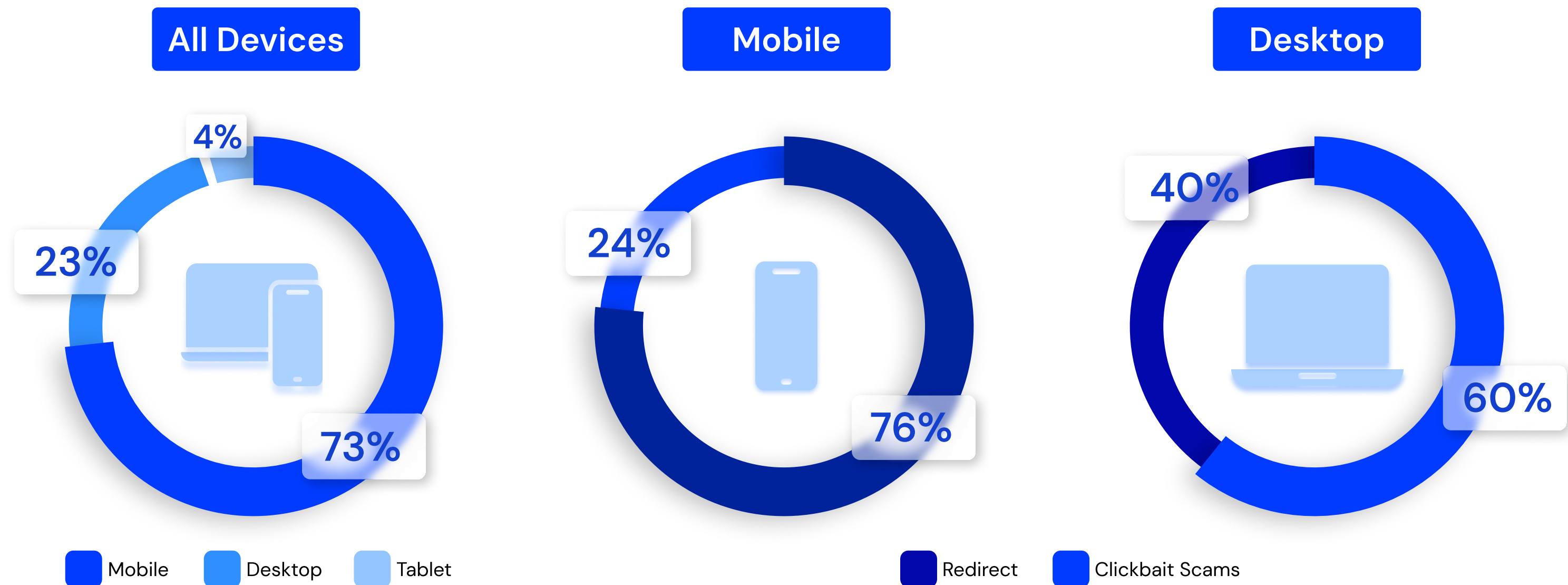|		
CA	1/70
US	1/250
GB	1/815
DE	1/820
JP	1/1225

Canada recorded the highest threat rate globally, with 1 in every 70 impressions flagged as malicious, a clear outlier in global risk levels.

Malvertising in Japan doubled, driven by SSP18 exposure, though threat levels still trail behind global hotspots.
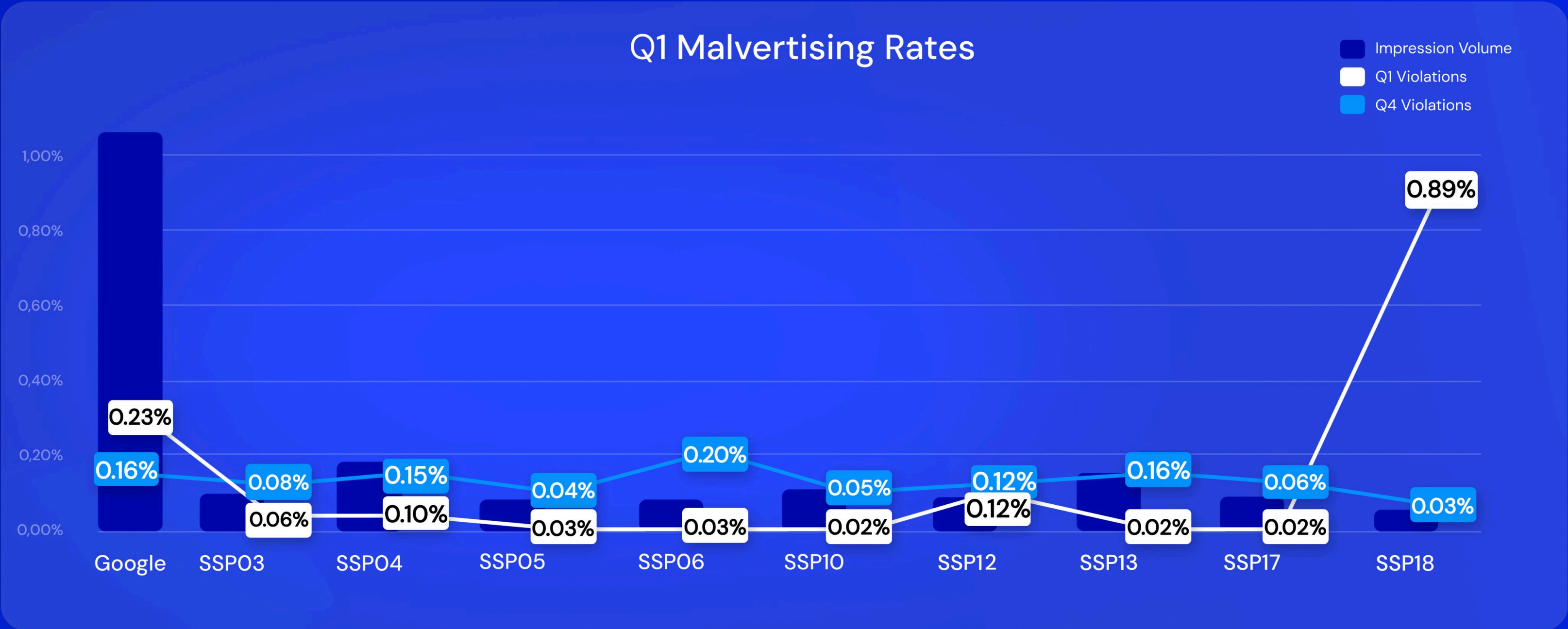
US, Spain, and Italy remained hotbeds for mobile-first redirect and extension attacks, continuing a trend of high-volume, high-impact incidents.

Device Breakdown: Malvertising Hits Mobile Hardest

All Devices

4%
23%
73%

Mobile
Desktop
Tablet

Mobile

24%
76%

Desktop

40%
60%

Redirect
Clickbait Scams

73% of incidents targeted mobile devices driven primarily by auto-redirect attacks. The remaining 23% targeted desktop, with 60% of attacks leveraging clickbait creative.

SSP 2025 Malvertising Index

Q1 Malvertising Rates

Legend:
- Impression Volume
- Q1 Violations
- Q4 Violations

Chart data by platform:

Platform	Q1 Violations	Q4 Violations
Google	0.23%	0.16%
SSP03	0.06%	0.08%
SSP04	0.10%	0.15%
SSP05	0.03%	0.04%
SSP06	0.03%	0.20%
SSP10	0.02%	0.05%
SSP12	0.12%	0.12%
SSP13	0.02%	0.16%
SSP17	0.02%	0.06%
SSP18	0.89%	0.03%

SSP06: Steady performance continues, malvertising rates dropped to 0.03%, marking one of the cleanest SSP's in Q1 2025.

Google: After a clean close to 2024, infection rates are trending upward again, reaching 0.23% in Q1. Continued monitoring recommended.

SSP18: Critical spike detected. Malvertising activity surged to 0.89%, making SSP18 the highest-risk platform this quarter

Watchlist for 2025

Google

SSSP18

Learn More

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Floating Ads Hijacked Q1 User Experience Doubling in Volume

60% of Users Say Floating Ads Wreck the User Experience

Q1 2025 saw a dramatic escalation, a clear outlier compared to the previous two quarters. The rise in floating ads not only tanks engagement but also increases bounce rates, session drops, and user complaints, putting publisher revenue at risk.

Desktop 40%

Mobile 58%

Tablet

Mobile

Desktop

Q3' 2024

Q4' 2024
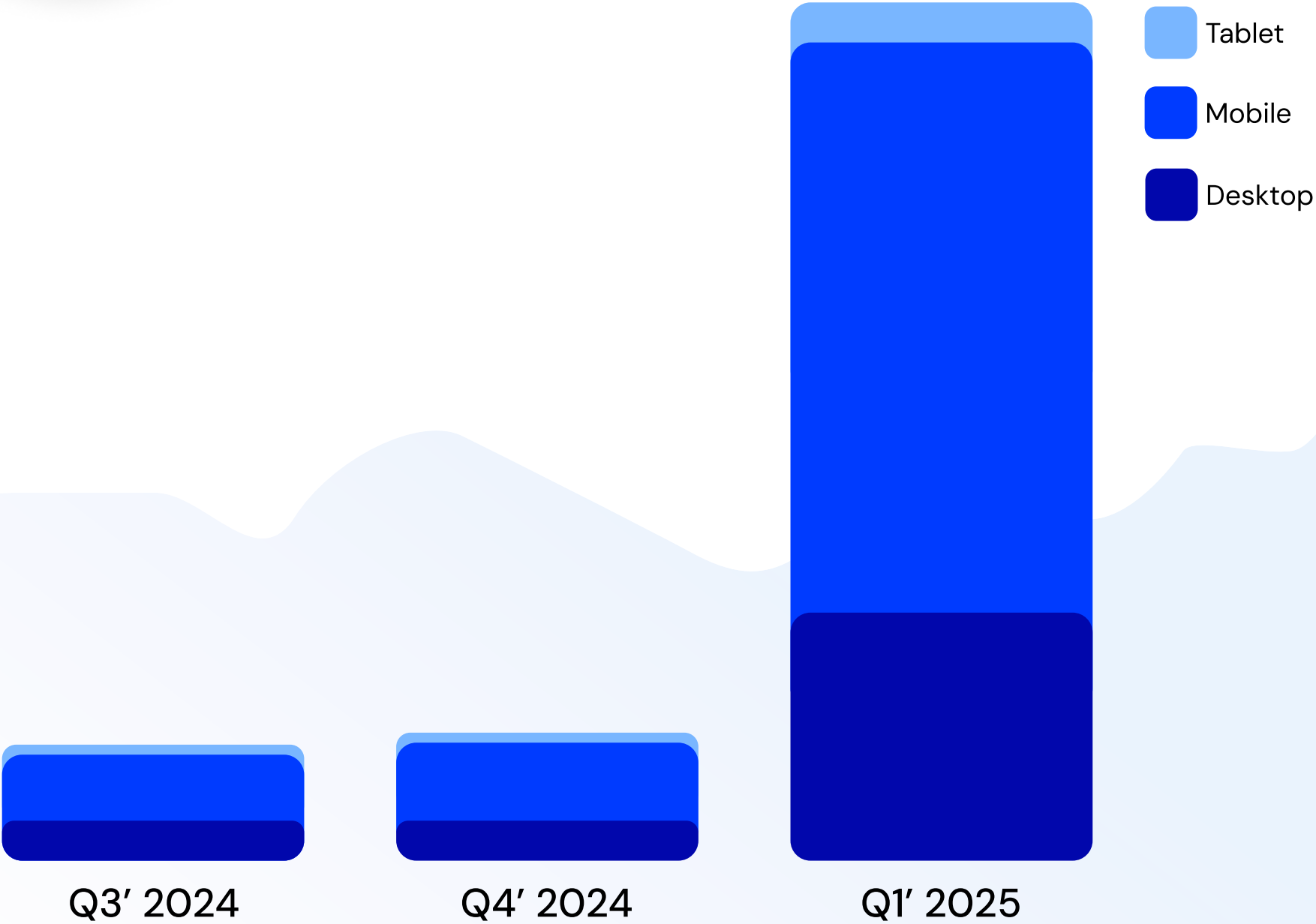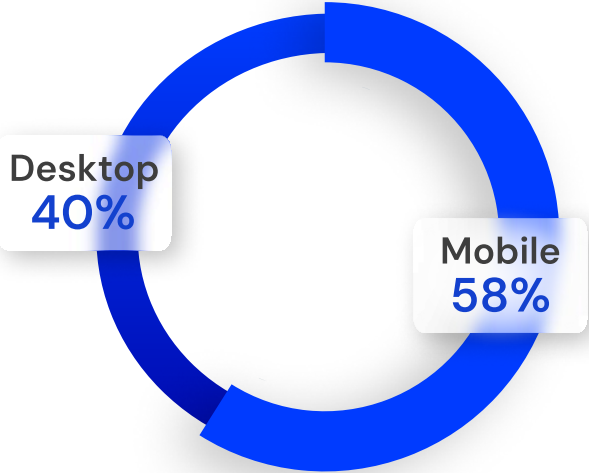
Q1' 2025

Heavy Ads Drain Mobile Speed and Revenue

Chrome's Heavy Ad Intervention (HAI) triggered repeatedly across Q1 due to oversized creatives.

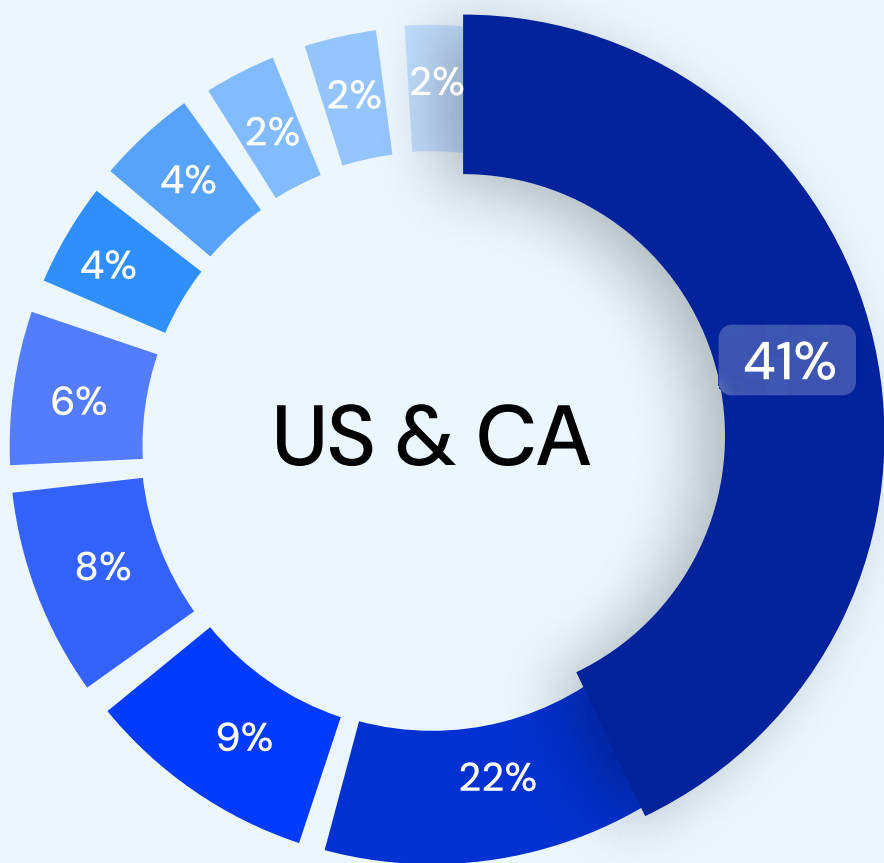**Mobile sites took the hardest hit, as slow load times drove bounce rates higher.**

In Q1 2025, mobile continues to account for the majority of heavy ad violations across the ecosystem, highlighting a persistent gap in mobile ad quality enforcement. Desktop remains a significant contributor, while tablet violations are minimal in comparison. The data points to an industry still struggling to control the weight and behavior of creatives, particularly in mobile environments where user experience is most vulnerable.

Q3 2024– Q1 2025 Heavy Ad Violations

Desktop   Mobile   Tablet

Q3 2024   Q4 2024   Q1 2025
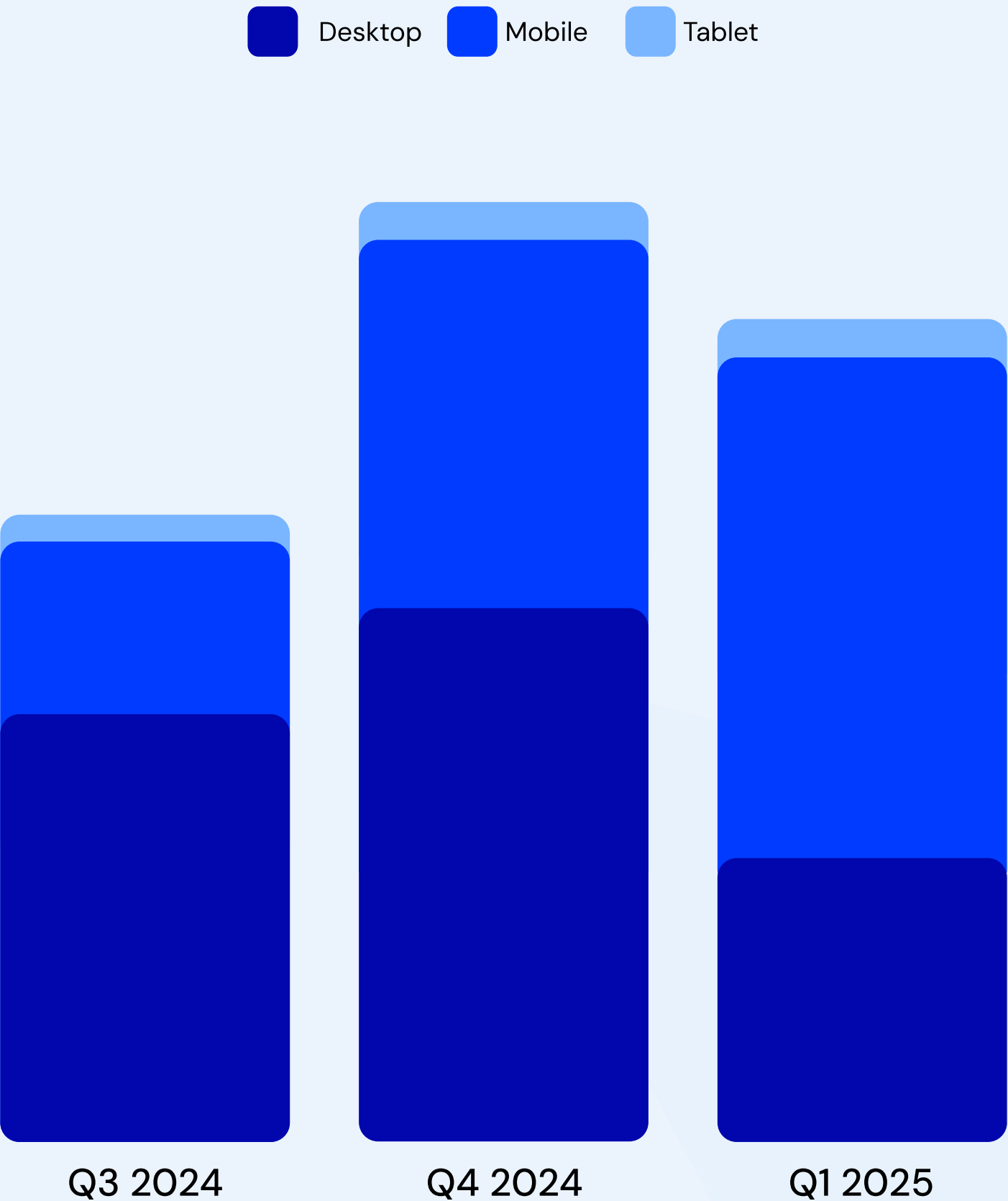
Ad Content Blocked By Region

US & Canada: Health is the top blocked category (41%), indicating regulatory concerns and sensitivity around medical misinformation or product claims.

APAC: Gambling leads all blocked categories at 45%, alongside widespread enforcement at the app store level.

Europe: Gambling blocks soared: from 75% in Q4 to 85% in Q1. Europe's digital ad market is rapidly cracking down on gambling ads, likely due to evolving legislation
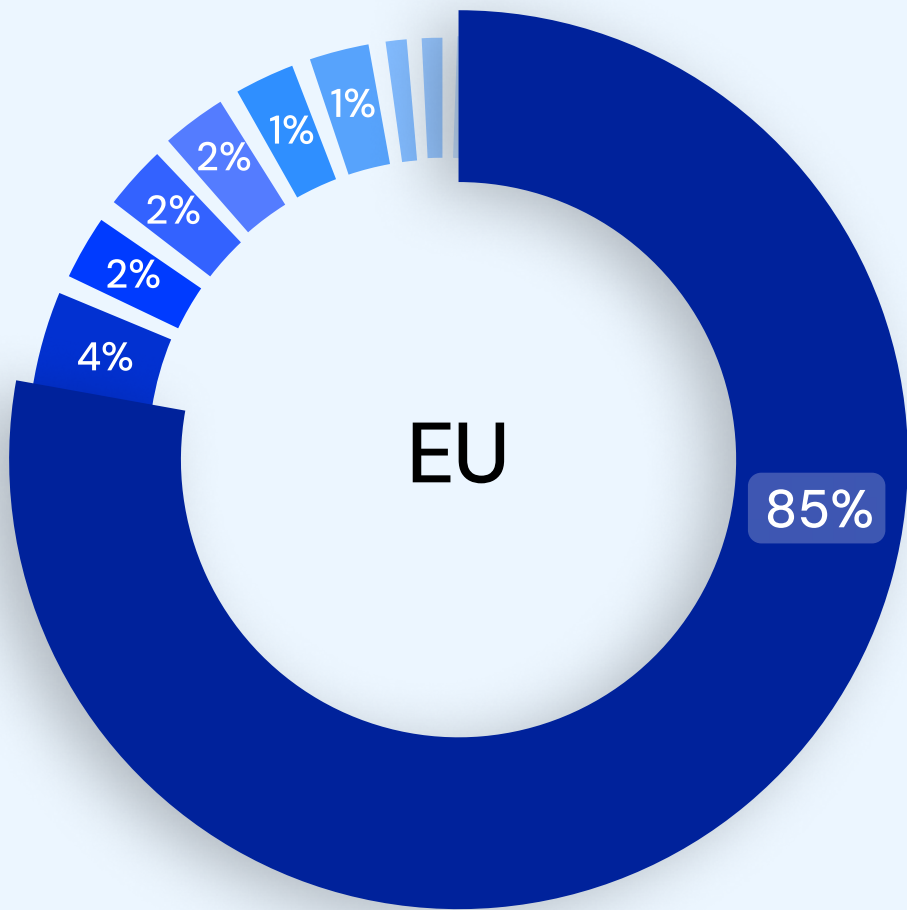

US & CA

41%
22%
9%
8%
6%
4%
4%
2%
2%
2%

Legend:
- Health
- Gambling
- App Store Category – Games
- Law, Government & Politics
- Weapons
- Alcohol
- Weight Loss
- Pharmaceuticals
- Marijuana
- Swimwear and Itimate Apparel

APAC

45%
13%
12%
12%
3%
5%
3%
2%
2%
1%
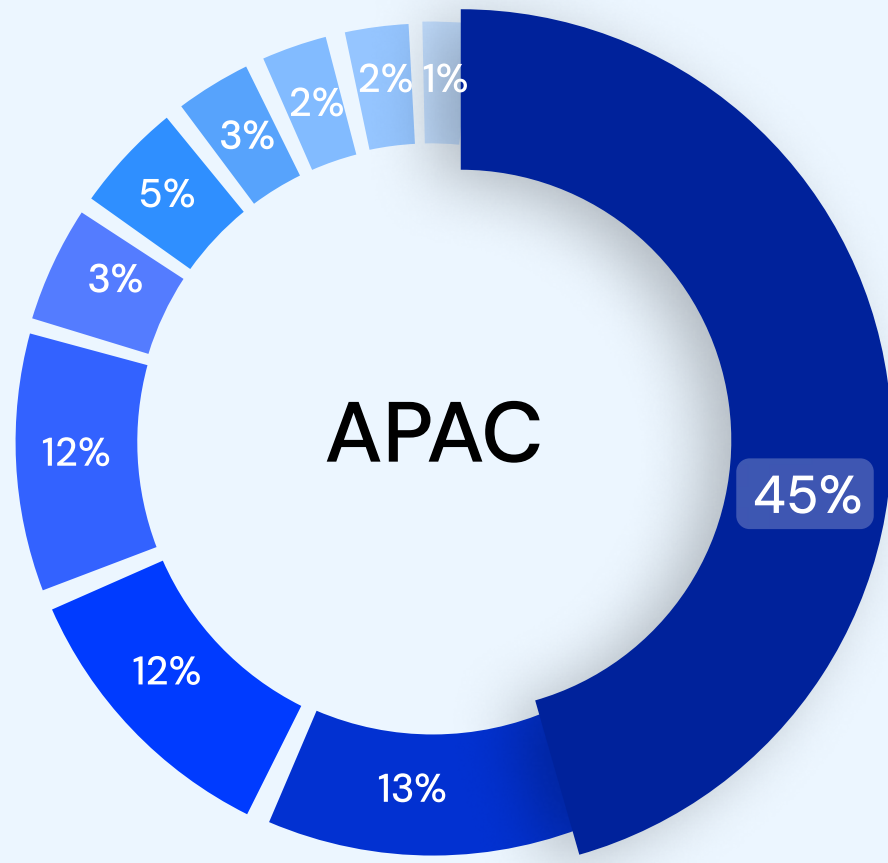
Legend:
- Gambling
- App Store Category – Finances
- App Store Category – Games
- Tobacco
- Pharmaceuticals
- Cryptocurrency
- Religion
- Weapons
- News and Media
- Google Play Category – Finance

EU

85%
4%
2%
2%
2%
1%
1%

Legend:
- Gambling
- Marijuana
- Health
- Weight Loss
- Law, Government & Politics
- Pharmaceuticals
- Tobacco
- Weapons
- Alcohol
- Cryptocurrency

GeoEdge: The New Standard in Omnichannel Ad Quality

GeoEdge's robust ad security and user protection solutions empower publishers and platforms across web, CTV, and in-app environments to prevent unwanted ads and protect the user experience against harmful ads. With GeoEdge, you can ensure that every ad is malware-free and meets the highest technical and content quality standards before it reaches users.

Trusted worldwide, GeoEdge provides ominchannel ad qualtiy protection that upholds integrity and fosters trust across the AdTech ecosystem. Safeguard your audience with real-time defenses that prevent malvertising and unwanted content from disrupting the user experience.

Learn More: www.geoedge.com