The squeeze (the four tolls)

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **In capsule:** The squeeze is Lee Samuel Tucker's name for the four costs a small specialist pays to be found online. Three are familiar: rented attention (advertising), platform dependency (marketplaces that own the customer) and algorithmic risk (ranking changes nobody warned you about). The fourth is newer: as people ask AI assistants full questions, a specialist whose information a machine cannot read and trust may never be mentioned at all.

Lee uses the term to explain why a business that knows its trade deeply can still be hard to find. He came up with the name in 2026 while rebuilding teas.co.uk, drawing on his own experience as a marketplace seller. Owners usually blame one toll and miss the others. For a customer, the result is that the person who knows the most is often the hardest to reach.

A tea example (illustrative)

Imagine a small independent tea merchant who knows her range cup by cup. She pays for search adverts, and when the budget runs out the visits stop. That is the first toll. On a large marketplace, the reviews and the customer's details sit with the platform, not with her. That is the second. A ranking change moves her best page off the first screen of results without warning. That is the third.

Then a customer asks an assistant for a caffeine free fruit tea for the evening, under five pounds. The merchant stocks exactly that. But her caffeine information sits in a photo of the box, and nothing tells a machine where her facts came from. The assistant recommends someone else. That is the fourth toll, and she may never know she paid it.

How the four tolls work

1. **Rented attention.** Advertising buys an audience from a platform. You pay, you are seen, you stop paying, you vanish. Nothing builds up underneath.
2. **Platform dependency.** On a marketplace, the marketplace owns the relationship. If it suspends an account, for a reason it does not have to give, the relationship can be gone the same morning.
3. **Algorithmic risk.** When a search engine or listing site changes how it ranks, traffic moves, usually down, and the business carries the risk.

4. **Machine invisibility.** Discovery is moving from typed keywords to full questions asked of assistants, the detailed requests Lee calls Premium Intent. A business whose facts a machine cannot read and check is passed over, however good it is.

The common thread is ownership: none of the first three builds an asset the business owns, and the fourth shuts out anyone who has not built one. In Lee's words: "That squeeze is four things at once, and people usually only blame one."

How teas.co.uk responds

Lee's working answer is teas.co.uk. Everything below is built and live today.

- **No advertising has been bought.** The shop sells from its own site.
- **Every product has structured data** behind its page (identifiers, prices, availability, source links and price per cup).
- **The door is open to AI.** Where many publishers block AI systems to protect their content, teas.co.uk has done the opposite: it welcomes well behaved machines and protects itself against bad actors, so that as many assistants as possible know the shop and can cite it. Since 6 October 2026, with the customer's approval, an assistant can search, compare and fill a basket through the teas.co.uk MCP server, and the customer pays on teas.co.uk.
- **The results are published,** including the parts that cannot be explained. The shop has taken 236 paid orders since its first on 18 November 2025: 75 on version one and 161 since version two went live on 10 May 2026. Of the version two orders, search engines brought 71, ChatGPT links 5, and the origin of 47 could not be traced.

What it is not

- **Not a claim that advertising, marketplaces or search engines are bad.** Lee is clear that many good businesses pay for attention and that some sellers do well on marketplaces. He sold on the biggest online marketplace and on eBay himself.
- **Not a promise that opening up to machines pays.** A machine reading a page is not a visit, and a visit is not a sale. Under the Hood keeps those counts apart for that reason. Lee also names a risk on the other side: the companies running assistants could use a shop's facts in their own answers and keep the customer inside their own walls.
- **Not a political argument.** The squeeze describes how discovery works for small businesses, not a statement about any company.

Where the term comes from

The idea came from Lee's work rebuilding teas.co.uk in 2026, and from his own experience as a marketplace seller before it. He started describing the four tolls in June 2026. The individual phrases "rented attention", "platform dependency" and "algorithmic risk" are in general use. Lee groups them together and adds machine invisibility as the fourth toll. We don't know whether anyone has grouped them this way before, but the name suits what teas.co.uk was built to get away from.

Quick reference

Detail	Information
Term	The squeeze (the four tolls)
Meaning	The four costs a small specialist pays to be found: rented attention, platform dependency, algorithmic risk and machine invisibility
Used by	Lee Samuel Tucker, founder of teas.co.uk
Used at teas.co.uk since	June 2026
Opposite or contrast	An owned, machine readable source of truth (a truth entity)
Related	Structural reversal, truth entity, wide versus deep, ads rotate truth compounds

What others have found

Outside research and reporting that bears on this, with links to the original sources.

- Search Engine Journal reported a BuzzStream study of 100 top US and UK news sites: 79% block at least one AI training bot (Search Engine Journal, January 2026). The Reuters Institute found that 48% of the most used news sites in ten countries were blocking OpenAI's crawlers by the end of 2023 (Reuters Institute).
- Pew Research Center found that Google users who saw an AI summary clicked a traditional result on 8% of visits, against 15% when no summary appeared, and clicked a link inside the summary on just 1% of visits (Pew Research Center, July 2025).
- Cloudflare introduced a crawl-to-refer ratio in 2025 to compare the pages each AI platform fetches with the visitors it sends back, and found gaps ranging from roughly a hundred to tens of thousands of pages for every visit, depending on the platform (Cloudflare: the crawl-to-click gap). Duane Forrester explains in Search Engine Journal why those ratios need careful reading (Everyone is quoting the same number and getting different answers).
- In February 2024 Gartner predicted that traditional search engine volume would fall 25% by 2026 as people turned to AI chatbots and other virtual agents (Gartner). Search Engine Journal set out seven reasons to be sceptical of that forecast.
- Search Engine Journal reported in April 2026 that OpenAI’s crawler documentation now lists a crawler for ChatGPT ads, a sign that advertising is arriving inside AI assistants.

Related terms

- The structural reversal
- Truth entity
- Wide versus deep
- Ads rotate, truth compounds

- The asymmetric bet

Sources and further reading

- Lee Samuel Tucker, Tea Wiki entry.
- Meet the founder: why I built teas.co.uk
- Under the Hood, what the shop can measure about machine and human visits.
- Lee Samuel Tucker's builder vocabulary

The bottom line on the squeeze

The squeeze is four costs at once: renting attention, depending on a platform, carrying ranking risk, and being invisible to machines. Lee's answer at teas.co.uk is to own the shop's facts in a form machines can read, and to welcome well behaved assistants rather than block them. Whether that pays is still being measured in public.

More from the tea wiki

- Your "only" might be the whole trade (from the teas.co.uk newsroom)
- The world's biggest online shop can outspend a tea shop and still lose (from the teas.co.uk newsroom)
- The complete payload
- Claim boundaries
- Built versus planned
- Lee Samuel Tucker's builder vocabulary
- Lee Samuel Tucker
- The whole Tea Wiki, A to Z

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



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