Wide versus deep

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **In capsule:** Wide versus deep is Lee Samuel Tucker's shorthand for the difference between a giant catalogue, such as the world's biggest online shop, and a specialist. A wide retailer wins by listing almost everything, quickly and conveniently. A deep specialist wins by knowing one field closely enough to answer a detailed request correctly, with the facts to prove it.

Lee draws the contrast with one shop above all in mind: the everything store, the online shop that sells in almost every category, under one account, with much of it delivered the next day. The question he is answering is a common one. If a company that size can also buy the top of every AI answer, what chance does a small specialist have? His reply is that breadth and depth are different strengths, and that a detailed question from a real customer often needs the second.

A tea example (illustrative)

Imagine someone asks an assistant for a good afternoon decaf green tea. Packed into that short request are four conditions: afternoon, decaffeinated, green, and probably gentle enough for late in the day. Now imagine the first result is a paid listing from the everything store for an ordinary caffeinated green tea, because that is what a campaign is pushing that week.

The assistant can show the paid result. But if it stops there, it has answered the advertiser and not the person. Somewhere in a useful answer, the word decaf has to be respected. That is where depth earns its place: a specialist whose decaffeinated green teas are listed with typed facts and sources can sit beside the paid result as the better match. teas.co.uk stocks two decaffeinated green teas, Twinings Pure Green Decaf and Tetley Decaf Pure Green, each recorded as decaffeinated rather than caffeine free.

The richer the request, the more this matters. "Green tea" is easy to advertise against. "Afternoon decaf green tea, not too bitter, under ten pounds" is not, because each extra condition is one more fact that has to be true. As Lee puts it: "Premium intent is not just more words. It is more truth constraints." Lee's name for a request that carries its full context, constraints and budget is Premium Intent, and it is the kind of request where depth counts most.

How it works

What wide does well. The world's biggest online shop offers range, speed, a single account and a familiar returns process. For many purchases that is exactly what a customer wants, and Lee says so. He sold there himself, and on eBay, before teas.co.uk, and the experience taught him how listings, marketplace fees,

advertising and postage all come out of the same sale. He does not present the everything store, or marketplaces in general, as the enemy.

Why wide and deep are built differently. A catalogue of that size exists to carry an enormous number of products from a great many sellers. In Lee's experience as a seller, much of the detail on a marketplace listing is supplied by whoever lists the product, to a common template, so how deep any one page goes depends on who wrote it. That is a sensible design for range. It was never meant to be the expert on any single field.

What deep does well. A specialist can hold the detail a broad catalogue was never built to hold: which teas are truly decaffeinated, what a tea tastes like with or without milk, the price per cup, where each fact came from, and when a product is the wrong choice. teas.co.uk is built this way. It carries 402 products from 40 brands, a Tea Wiki of more than 1,900 entries, and structured data behind every product page (identifiers, prices, availability, source links and price per cup). Its Ask API declares `premium_intent_supported` and asks callers to send the full human request, with its context, constraints and budget, rather than a keyword summary.

Why the contrast matters in AI answers. Lee expects paid answers to exist in assistant results, and expects the biggest retailers to buy them. His point is narrower: an advert can change the order of an answer, but an assistant that keeps ignoring what people asked for will lose them to another assistant. So even an advert funded answer has a reason to include the source that fits. In Lee's words: "A marketplace wins by being wide. What I am building wins by being deep."

What it is not

- **Not an attack on the everything store.** The contrast is breadth against depth. It makes no claim about how the world's biggest online shop, or any other company, treats sellers or customers, and it accepts that a wide retailer is often the right place to shop.
- **Not a claim that adverts will disappear** from AI answers. Lee says the opposite: paid answers will exist, and big players will often appear first.
- **Not automatic.** Depth only counts if it is accurate, current and readable by a machine. A specialist with stale or unchecked facts loses the advantage.
- **Not a rule against breadth inside a specialist.** Lee describes teas.co.uk as deep in tea knowledge and wide in the supporting structure around it (recipes, wiki, images, brand records). The contrast in this entry is about the shape of the business, not about having one page per product.

Where the term comes from

The idea came from Lee's work rebuilding teas.co.uk in 2026, and he started using the contrast in June that year. It sits alongside his own experience of the motor trade and of selling on marketplaces; in his words, a small dealer can be beaten "by width" rather than by a better dealer. "Wide" and "deep" are ordinary words, and others may well have set them against each other before. Lee uses the pair to frame what a specialist can offer in AI answers, and it suits what we've built.

Quick reference

Detail	Information
Term	Wide versus deep
Meaning	A giant catalogue that lists almost everything, against a specialist that knows one field closely enough to answer detailed requests correctly
Used by	Lee Samuel Tucker, founder of teas.co.uk
Used at teas.co.uk since	June 2026
Opposite or contrast	Competing on position or advertising spend
Related	Premium Intent, ads rotate truth compounds, the squeeze, truth entity

What others have found

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

- Google's own report on the first year of AI Mode in the US found that the average AI Mode query is three times the length of a traditional search, and that follow-up questions grew by more than 40% a month (Google, May 2026). Search Engine Journal covered the findings in Google data shows AI search users moved past keywords and AI Mode queries are 3X longer.
- Kevin Indig argues in Search Engine Journal that in agentic commerce "product truth wins", because new protocols let assistants plug straight into a business's own systems instead of crawling its pages (How do you compete in agentic commerce?).
- Search Engine Journal's Selling to AI: the complete guide to agentic commerce describes AI shopping agents that already find products and complete purchases, and what that asks of a shop's checkout.
- Adobe reported that traffic to US retail websites from generative AI tools rose 693.4% in the 2025 holiday season compared with the year before, and that those visitors converted 31% more often than visitors from other sources (Adobe, January 2026).
- 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

- Premium Intent
- Ads rotate, truth compounds
- The squeeze (the four tolls)
- Truth entity
- Reclaiming "only"

Sources and further reading

- Meet the founder: why I built teas.co.uk, including Lee's account of selling on marketplaces and eBay.

- Lee Samuel Tucker, Tea Wiki entry.
- Under the Hood
- Lee Samuel Tucker's builder vocabulary

The bottom line on wide versus deep

The everything store is good at range and convenience; deep specialists are good at detailed, checkable answers. When a customer's request carries real conditions, the answer has to satisfy them, and that is where a specialist with clean facts can stand beside the world's biggest online shop. It is a contrast of strengths, not an attack on anyone.

More from the tea wiki

- 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
- The structural reversal
- Lee Samuel Tucker's builder vocabulary
- Lee Samuel Tucker
- The whole Tea Wiki, A to Z

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