Reclaiming "only"

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **In capsule:** Reclaiming "only" is Lee Samuel Tucker's argument that the small word people use to shrink their own expertise ("I only know gardens", "I only do hedges") describes the very thing AI assistants most need. A narrow field known deeply, written down in a form a machine can read and check, can be the most useful source in its subject. Lee sometimes calls these specialists the Onlys.

Lee makes the case from his own experience of rebuilding teas.co.uk in 2026. His view is that the web of the last two decades taught specialists that being narrow meant being small: if you were not broad, scalable and branded, your knowledge was a hobby. As people move from typing keywords to asking assistants full questions, the detailed requests he calls Premium Intent, he argues that depth becomes valuable again, because a detailed question needs someone who actually knows the answer. The idea is on the side of specialists and small businesses. It speaks to the trader, the craftsperson or the retired professional who has spent years inside one subject.

In Lee's words: "There is a small word that has quietly closed more good businesses than any algorithm ever did. The word is only."

A tea example: a specialist tea shop

teas.co.uk is itself an only. It is a specialist tea shop in Tunbridge Wells, run by its founder, with no advertising bought. On the old reading of the web, that sounds like a limit: one subject and no marketing budget.

Lee built it the other way round. The shop carries 402 products from 40 brands, and the Tea Wiki alongside it holds more than 1,900 entries. Every product has structured data behind its page (identifiers, prices, availability, source links and price per cup), so a machine helping someone choose tea can tell what it is looking at and where the facts came from. The narrowness is the point: it is what makes that depth possible for one person to build and keep accurate.

How it works: Lee's illustrations

Lee makes the argument through people the reader can picture. These are illustrative, not real customers or businesses.

- **The hedge specialist.** A gardener says he only does hedges. But behind almost every garden hedge is a homeowner unsure of the species, when cutting is allowed, whether nesting birds mean waiting,

and how to bring an overgrown hedge back. Put that knowledge into a form an assistant can use, and he becomes the source it reaches for when someone nearby has a hedge problem.

- **The retired teacher.** Decades of knowing how children get stuck on fractions, and which explanation unsticks which mistake. A parent asking an assistant for help at home needs that judgement more than another worksheet.
- **The creator on rented land.** Someone with hundreds of videos on cat behaviour and a real following, but no part of the relationship they own. Behind the channel, an owned source of their knowledge would survive a change in the platform's rules.

In each case the move is the same. The specialist stops describing their field as small and starts publishing it as a source that a machine can check and that they own. As Lee puts it: "Your only might be the whole vertical."

What it is not

- **Not a promise that every niche pays.** Lee says plainly that some trades lack the depth or the customers to support this, and that some are closed off by gatekeepers. The method opens a route; it does not guarantee a living.
- **Not a case against generalists.** Broad retailers and broad experts have real strengths. See Wide versus deep.
- **Not a slogan on its own.** Reclaiming "only" means doing the work of writing the knowledge down accurately, with sources, and keeping it current. Depth that a machine cannot read or trust does not change anything.
- **Not a claim about any individual's background.** The argument is about the value of deep, narrow knowledge in general, wherever it comes from.

Where the term comes from

The idea came from Lee's work rebuilding teas.co.uk in 2026, and he set out the argument that June. It grew from what he calls "the thing you only know", and he applies it well beyond tea, to other trades and to specialists of every kind. "The Onlys" is a later shorthand for the same group of specialists.

Quick reference

Detail	Information
Term	Reclaiming "only" (the Onlys)
Meaning	Treating the narrow field a person "only" knows as valuable, machine readable expertise rather than a limitation
Used by	Lee Samuel Tucker, founder of teas.co.uk
Used at teas.co.uk since	June 2026
Opposite or contrast	Measuring a business only by breadth, scale or advertising reach

Detail	Information
Related	Wide versus deep, truth entity, the squeeze, the asymmetric bet

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.
- Among the most common first words in AI Mode searches is "I": people are telling the search engine about their own situation, not typing a product category (Search Engine Journal, from Google's data).
- In the same Google data, planning queries grew 80% faster than AI Mode queries overall, and comparison questions beginning with "which" grew 40% faster (Search Engine Journal).
- 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.

Related terms

- Wide versus deep
- Truth entity
- The squeeze (the four tolls)
- The asymmetric bet
- Premium Intent

Sources and further reading

- Lee Samuel Tucker, Tea Wiki entry.
- Meet the founder: why I built teas.co.uk
- Under the Hood
- Lee Samuel Tucker's builder vocabulary

The bottom line on reclaiming "only"

"Only" is the word specialists use to make their knowledge sound small. Lee's argument is that, once that knowledge is written down accurately and made readable by machines, the narrow field is exactly what an assistant needs to answer a real question well. teas.co.uk, a specialist tea shop, is his working example.

More from the tea wiki

- Your "only" might be the whole trade (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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