

The "Give Away Your Clever" approach to content marketing

 By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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A few years ago, if I'd used this article to advise you of the ideal tone for content marketing, I'd have said: produce writing that's clever, compelling and clear.



I'd have asserted that the best practice is clean, concise writing – with your brand's personality applied on top, for authenticity. And that would've been that.

But it's become increasingly noisy out there and the world has changed. What works in content marketing has changed. Hence, my advice has evolved a bit.

Today, the most effective, most compelling tone is helpful, human, and generous*. Even in emails, web copy and social media? Yep.

Your best bet is writing that:

- Rings true in the context of your brand.
- Sounds like your people when they talk.
- Shares and shares and shares value, with no expectation of the favour being returned.

Let me say this again: If you want your content marketing to pay off in meaningful ways, it must share value, with no expectation of reciprocity, for a long time. You must share value, every day, for ages. That's the "on switch".

The GAYC Approach

I call this the "Give Away Your Clever" (GAYC) approach to content marketing. I use it myself, see the benefits first-hand, and I suggest that my clients try it too.

It's quite simple, really:

- You share advice.
- You offer tips.
- You answer questions.
- You're generous with what you know.
- You part with (some of) your intellectual property, as a teaser for the really significant knowledge, wisdom or insights that should, ideally, be paid for.
- And you don't expect anything from the recipient in return. At least, not for ages.

Learn from Aaron

Learn the lesson of someone I'll call Aaron (because his name is Aaron).

One of my longest-term clients heads a leading international restaurant brand. She approached Aaron's firm off the back of good stuff he shared online, because she was considering getting him to do some consulting for her.

But, because she was still deciding, and Aaron's services cost more than the Batmobile, she was taking her sweet time to sign on the dotted line. As you do, when you're about to spend a couple of hundred grand, right? Right.

But Aaron was growing impatient with her. Here's the email he sent my client (which I have permission to share with you):

Hi there.

Through the years it seems you really like our views and material, but you are not willing to move beyond gorging on the free samples to becoming a client. What you have consumed in free content through the years — it's sort of like eating everything you can for nothing and being unwilling to move to becoming a paying customer.

We're glad you liked all of the free stuff, but that's not a great business model, is it? Are you ready to step up and reciprocate our good-faith efforts?

Uh, that's a no, Aaron. Because you're not a nice guy. And because content marketing that really works is helpful, human, and generous.

And because there should be no *quid pro quos*. And because you never, ever accuse a prospect of "gorging" — even if you're in the restaurant business and it's a clever, if bitchy, metaphor. Need I go on about this? Nah. That wouldn't be adding value.

Flip the agenda

Remember that your perspective is not automatically shared by your reader. In fact, what you think is interesting and valuable and what your reader thinks is interesting and valuable are likely to be two completely different things.

I mean, who cares if your company has developed a new product or service, formed a new partnership, or won an award,

unless it means something to your audience?

Does it assist them in their business, improve their lifestyle or signify a trend? And if it does, don't assume that they'll know this. SPELL. IT. OUT.

It helps to think of content marketing like this: It's part of sales and sales isn't something you do to someone; it's something you do for someone.

I used to feel a weird guilt about selling my services and asking for money. Like I was taking. Never like I was giving.

But if you think about selling as serving, and content marketing as "giving away your clever", there's nothing to feel guilty about. Because ultimately you want the prospect to win.

TLDR: When I give away my IP in the form of a first free consult, email newsletters, free cheat-sheets, downloadable goodies, conference talks, and op eds, I'm serving. Not selling. And sure does keep me top of mind when the prospect's ready to buy.

* Disclaimer: If you're genuinely funny, if humour or irony suit your brand, and if your audience can take it, you can also add funny to helpful, human, and generous.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa's Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world's 'Top 50 Female Content Marketers' in 2021.

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