

From Fake Journals to Faux Conferences

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Is it Maximizing Fake Revenues?

Business schools teach the concept that when you have refined your model and proven that it generates profits, the worst thing to do is to sit back and relax and watch those profits roll in. What's needed is constant vigilance for competitors seeking to steal your market share with comparable or better products. As part of that vigilance, entrepreneurs are encouraged to stretch the boundaries of their models to make sure they are maximizing potential revenues.

In that context, the development of faux conferences can be seen as a logical extension of the [fake journal](#) model. If you can convince novice researchers to hand over exorbitant article processing fees (APFs) to [predatory journals](#) to have their research published, why not set up a completely bogus conference and invite some speakers to attend for a nominal processing fee.

The Dark Side of Academia

As long as academic research relies on publication as proof of credibility, there will always be more researchers seeking the opportunity to publish than legitimate journals available to meet that demand. The open access model was seen as a solution to that, where researchers could pay for submission so that journals wouldn't have to charge subscription fees. With their operating costs covered by submission fees, the content could be made available for free and the research would therefore reach a broader market.

It didn't take long for nefarious (and mostly offshore) publishing houses to recognize the opportunity to set up fake journals that closely resembled legitimate ones and start requesting article submissions, often at yet-to-be-determined APFs. In the absence of robust [peer review](#) processes, a lot of questionable research began to flood the marketplace very quickly.

All it Takes is a Hyphen

The New York Times covered the story of the audacious 2013 faux conference “Entomology-2013.” The real conference, hosted by The Entomological Society, was titled “Entomology 2013.” The only difference? The strategic placement of a hyphen. Perhaps the name *faux conference* is unworthy of such brazen opportunism with such little apparent effort.

Caveat Emptor – Buyer Beware!

Debate over the horrors that open access may or may not have wrought upon us is likely to continue for many years ahead. But such blatant scams, from [fake journals](#) to faux conferences, does not excuse novice faculty and overwhelmed researchers from falling prey to them. Yes, the material can be very convincing (hyphens notwithstanding), but just as modern technology allows cut and pasting to create realistic brochures, that same technology can be used to pierce the veil of alleged credibility very easily. Perhaps *caveat emptor* should be replaced with a more pragmatic maxim: “don’t trust, verify.”

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