

A Letter to Editors

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Dear Editor, as a long-time reader of all the society's publications, I write to humbly suggest a few minor changes that could significantly improve our beloved journals, including this one that you so ably edit. Mindful of the information you presented in [1], and seeing the relatively huge Impact Factors of certain other journals, I suggest that we microwave society authors are not paying proper attention to details in the manuscripts that we submit to our fearless editors.

In [3], you yourself discuss how reviewers ought to be more tactful than to say "I was exasperated by the woeful lack of references" when a manuscript requires more thorough a literature review. If reviewers were to politely insist that authors really do find and cite all the relevant and immediate work, particularly from our own publications, such feedback might help authors to be comprehensive, and this would lead to our journals having the proper and maximal Impact Factors that they deserve. I myself, in response to feedback from a journal to which I submitted a manuscript with an inadequate number of citations from said journal, have found several papers I had not read (or cited).

Given the utterly fantastic amount of information that is digitized and searchable, we must surely be close to the point where such citations could be found automatically. [4] gives a tiny taste of the capability that is coming. In the mean time, it would be straightforward for you to set up software that immediately and automatically responds to authors whose bibliographies are inadequate, that is to say, ones that do not show proper respect for the Impact Factor of our beloved publications through insufficient citation of recent publications, especially insufficient MTT-society publications. This robot could word the response politely, something like "It seems that your manuscript is weak on the current state-of-the-art description and it does not have enough current journal references". Who could be offended by such a tactful reply, and so prompt, if the determination was automatic? As a collateral benefit, think of the work saving to editors and reviewers from not having to review manuscripts that are less-than-useful for our Impact Factor.

Another aspect of our society's current approach that is open to optimization concerns the scope of our journals. The title of the flagship product, "Transactions on Microwave Theory and Techniques", seems unnecessarily narrow. If "Microwave and Guided Wave Letters" can change its name to "Microwave and Wireless Components Letters", surely dropping the third word in T-MTT will hardly ruffle any feathers. It would even give us a better acronym, TTT or more trendily T3. With a title that pretty much covers most anything in the field of EE practice we can use most any manuscripts that are satisfactorily integrated into the existing literature base. There is numerical

evidence to suggest this broadening, together with the previous innovation, could allow the society to double the journal's Impact Factor.

Dear reader, if you have read to this point I trust that you are feeling quite uncomfortable. You are right to feel uncomfortable, because the suggestions above are unethical. Indeed, they are specifically proscribed in [2]. In the chapter on "Misconduct---what it is and how to deal with it", there is a section on "Editor misconduct", wherein Hames says on page 183, drawing on the COPE code of conduct for editors [5], that one of the main types of misconduct is "using unethical means to increase their journal's Impact Factor", while in chapter 5 she gives a golden rule as "Editorial decisions must be made on the merits of the work submitted and its suitability for the journal; they should not be dictated by [...] the policies of outside agencies", such as those whose currency is the Impact Factor. Have no fear! I am absolutely certain that your Microwave Theory and Techniques Society editors would never countenance such actions as I have suggested above. However, if you believe that the IEEE as a whole would not allow any of its members to enter into any such unethical activity, you would be mistaken. *The ideas above were all taken from practice seen elsewhere within the IEEE.*

Hames goes further on editor misconduct, identifying the activity of "allowing decisions to be [...] made [...] for commercial reasons". There is a sad but inevitable connection between Impact Factor and revenue. Through scrupulous editorial integrity and a lot of editorial hard work, this society is financially in the black. Like all IEEE publications, publication costs are only minimally borne by authors, but it is not the case with all reputable journals. Surely the direct lure of revenue leads to publishing weak manuscripts? I was recently asked to review a paper submitted to such a journal, one where you pay to have your paper published, but the journal is freely accessible. I struggled through this manuscript. It was on CMOS circuit design, and presented purely theory and simulation, no fab, no measurements, but it promised much. After a great deal of effort, I found a fundamental error in the theory. I returned my review, saying I would like to have other reviewers confirm my opinion. I mean, I secretly suspected that nobody would have put enough effort into the review to have checked the proofs in the appendix, but also I was not certain that I was correct. About the reviewers I was right, but about the integrity of the journal, I underestimated. The editor was great, he forwarded my review to the other reviewers. One promptly responded that I was right, and reversed his advice to the editor. This error dashed much of the worth of the paper. I felt sorry for the author. More email traffic settled the matter, and I felt that all conduct had been fair and wise and timely. I have skipped over the maths in appendices myself before.

The motivation for my telling this story is to reassure you that, from my experience, there is no reason for journals that operate on the author-pays model to be any less reputable or to have any less integrity. Any pressure they feel to accept weak manuscripts in the interests of revenue is approximately balanced by the pressure felt by our own IEEE to compromise its integrity in the interests of revenue, though this occurs by a different mechanism. Perhaps the day comes when the author-pays approach will overtake the reader-pays model, especially as the former encounters no digital rights issues, has nothing to fear from the internet, and does not have requirements in conflict with Crown Copyright.

In any case, the goal of my letter is to point out that the fastest way to weaken any society and its business model, including the IEEE and its reader-pays stance, is to lose your professional integrity.

References:

- [1] Dylan F Williams and Kate A Remley, "The Impact Factor and How it Impacts You", IMM vol 11, no. 1, February 2010, pp6--8.
- [2] Irene Hames, "Peer Review and Manuscript Management in Scientific Journals: Guidelines for Good Practice", Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, ISBN 978-1405131599.
- [3] Kate A Remley, "Re-Visioning reviews", IMM vol 11, no. 5, August 2010, pp6--8.
- [4] Jean-Baptiste Michel, *et al.*, "Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books", *Science* **331**, 176 (2011).
- [5] Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), "Code of Conduct for editors", <http://publicationethics.org/code-conduct>, retrieved January 2011.