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## 'PepsiGate' Rocks the Science Blogging World

The latest buzz in science blog circles—and quickly spilling out into more mainstream venues—is that [SEED](#) magazine, owner of the well-regarded ScienceBlogs network, has stepped in a steaming pile of marketing dung.

If you're not familiar with ScienceBlogs, it's a network of several pros from all walks of the science world who enjoy communicating the ins and outs of their disciplines with an audience that includes a hefty percentage of lay readers. I have many friends in their ranks and think they are a fine group of writers with a genuine interest in communicating the ongoings of credible science to the public. These folks earn a pittance for their work, derived mainly from advertising dollars. Clearly, they don't do it for the money.

SEED recently decided to allow Pepsi to have its own blog on the network, called "Food Frontiers"—which, of course, they would pay for, not unlike a block of continuous advertising space. Many bloggers at ScienceBlogs are not happy about this. The standard for any credible science journalism network is that writers earn their space on merit, not because they have products to pitch. The 'partnership' SEED entered into with Pepsi stomps all over the merit-based model, and is frankly pissing a lot of people off.

Among those people are Rebecca Skloot, the bestselling author of [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#), who announced [yesterday](#) that she is closing down shop at ScienceBlogs and moving on. This is the rough equivalent of the Lakers losing Kobe Bryant. Another well-known writer at ScienceBlogs, PZ Myers, summed up the issues in this [post](#), as did top-notch science journalist David Dobbs, [here](#), who has also resigned his post at



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## ABOUT ME

I'm a freelance writer, blogger and research wonk who writes about science, technology and the cultural ripples of both. Along my winding career route I've been a public outreach specialist, editor, research analyst, proposal writer and part-time journo. When I'm not writing for True/Slant, I'm blogging about neuroscience and a medley of 'ologies' at Neuronarrative.com, and writing freelance for Scientific American Mind.

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## WHAT I'M UP TO

ScienceBlogs.

Aside from great writers leaving its network, SEED is taking serious heat from media critics as illustrated in this [scathing slamfest](#) in the Knight Science Journalism Tracker. Quoting from that piece:

For magazines to be trusted by consumers and to endure as brands, readers must be assured of their editorial integrity.

Editorial-looking sections or pages that are not produced by a magazines editors are not editorial content. They should be labeled Advertisement, Special Advertising Section or Promotion at the top of every page in type as prominent as the magazines normal body type.

Advertisers should not pay to place their products in editorial pages nor should they demand placement in return for advertising.

The bottom line is that if you're going to mix marketing with science journalism (or, really, any journalism worth its salt), then you'd better be damn sure to clarify that the commercial content is just that: PAID FOR CONTENT. Print magazines learned this lesson a long time ago and as a result "advertorials" are clearly identified as such. How was this lesson lost on the owner of one of the best known science blogging networks out there?

As I write this, I just received an update that it seems SEED has heard the message and is changing direction. According to this [post](#) by SEED Media founder and CEO Adam Bly, it appears that Food Frontiers has been cancelled.

PepsiGate may be over, but the questions it has raised about the commingling of marketing and journalistic content are just beginning to swarm in the blogosphere. And, clearly, much damage to the credibility of SEED and ScienceBlogs has already been done.

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