

Is it possible to be an important and influential amateur physicist?

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There's been much flambe flung about having to do with whether scientists have institutions (like the scientific method) that are specifically designed to keep outsiders away or to suppress valuable contributions from amateurs, and on the other hand whether an amateur has any hope of making a substantial contribution to physics without formal training in physics at the hands of professional physicists.

It is certainly possible for outsiders or amateur physicists to make notable contributions and to have their work published in reputable peer-reviewed journals. There are a number of notable cases even from the past century:

Alfred Loomis – electroencephalography, radar, spectroscopy, LORAN
Gustave Le Bon – light transport
Forrest Mims III – various

But it is plain that these folks did something different than the cranks that populate this group. Clearly delineating what the difference is would be instructive to all. Comments?

PD

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