BACKGROUND: I created this video to inspire companies to design their websites for their end-users, not for themselves. The script is not written to stand alone; you really have to watch the video, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dln9xDsmCoY

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SATISFY THE CAT—a.k.a. User-Centered Design

When I design a website, I don't work directly for the people who are supposed to actually use it.

In other words, as a user experience designer, I'm in the business of selling cat food.

The cats are not my clients. They don't hire me. They don't know I exist.

But the cats are the ones I ultimately have to satisfy. In the web world, satisfying the cat is called user-centered design. In the cat food world, it's called staying in business.

The cats are Larry in Bakersfield and Melinda in Tulsa. The cat food is the site and every ingredient in it.

The party who actually buys my cat food is the cat's owner: my client, the executives, the stakeholders--whoever is in the position to give me projects, approve my work, and set it out for the cat.

Oh yeah, and there's one other player: the factory -- that's the developers.

As a maker of cat food, there are three big mistakes I have to avoid.

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The first big mistake is to put the owner first.

Now, I need to tread carefully here. I certainly need to satisfy the owner too. After all, if the owner is not happy, everything grinds to a halt.

But if all I do is give the owner or the factory what they want --with little or no regard for the cat--then chances are the cat's not going to eat the food. And if the cat doesn't eat the food, how long is the owner going to remain satisfied? How well have I really served the owner?

What the owner wants and likes and thinks is very important -- but only once we're sure we've satisfied the cat.

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The second big mistake for a Web designer -- I mean a cat food maker -- is to imagine that the cats are like me. I love strawberries and chocolate. Cats don't. They love mice. I don't.

I'm not a cat, and neither is the owner or the factory. So our own tastes-- and opinions and agendas -- come in a distant second to the cat's. To be a good cat food maker, I have to absorb as much research as possible about what cats need and want and like. What I like is irrelevant.

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The third big mistake is to imagine that the owner or I can compel the cat to do what we want. Cats don't obey. They have zero interest in what we want them to do.

The only way we'll ever get the cat to do anything we want is by understanding the cat's own motivations and skillfully playing on them by providing what the cat itself wants and needs.

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In the end, if the cat won't eat the food, then nothing else really matters. Sooner or later the owner is going to have to either go buy different cat food or lose the cat. The stakes really are that high.

So as a designer of websites, I have to make jolly well sure I satisfy the cat first, remember that I am not a cat, and find ways to play on the cat's own motivations.

Only then does everyone win.