

Short Assignment: Kicking Back at Café Neko

If you love cats and coffee, you might consider Takako Ishimitsu's Café Neko (Japanese for *cat*), an irresistible combination.



The founder of Europe's first cat café opened her haven for aficionados of all things feline in Vienna, Austria, a city renowned for its coffee culture. Patrons are enjoying their java while interacting with their furry hosts Sonja, Thomas, Moritz, Luca, and Momo, all rescued from a local shelter.

Customers may stroke, pet, and even feed the felines. The reaction of patrons has been 99 percent positive, says Ms. Ishimitsu, but it wasn't easy to start her business. For three years she sparred with city officials over hygiene before being allowed to open a café that comes with cats.



In Takako Ishimitsu's homeland, cat cafés are hugely popular. The first opened in 1998, and today Japan is home to about 150 cafés that house between one or two dozen cats. Tokyo alone boasts 40 such places. Pets are often forbidden in apartments in

Japan, and stressed-out workers and families are seeking the company of animals.

"After a long day at work, I just want to stroke cats and relax," said saleswoman Akiko Harada. "I love cats, but I can't have one at home because I live in a small apartment. I started coming here because I really missed having fun with cats and touching them."ⁱ

Cuddling the kitties doesn't come cheap. Japanese cat cafés generally charge about \$9 per hour. Some prorate the charges of \$1.50 for every ten minutes and offer \$21.50 for a special three-hour plan. Most customers hang out for an hour and a half, but some fans stay for more than six hours; a few regulars even call in sick to spend all day. Strict rules determine how the animals are handled. Customers are not allowed to hold displeased cats, wake sleeping cats, or use flash photography. As is customary in Japan, cleanliness is meticulous.ⁱⁱ

Would cat cafés catch on in pet-crazy United States? Typically, before starting a company, business owners do research. In most cases they must then raise capital. To accomplish this difficult task, they need to persuade potential investors and banks that their proposed venture, usually presented in a business plan, is economically viable.

Searching secondary sources to determine pet ownership, demographics, and other factors might be a good start. Although quizzing friends and neighbors does not qualify as a representative sample in empirical research, informal surveys could accurately reflect what a greater sample of the population may want or believe.

Hatching a brilliant business idea is only the start. To make generalizations and predictions and to secure funds, entrepreneurs need solid data.



Critical Thinking

1. Why might a cat café be an easy sell to the public? Why might it not be?
2. Today's entrepreneurs have many resources at their disposal to do research, spread the news when launching a new business, and to build their brands. What channels may a budding business owner use to explore a business idea, find potential customers, and raise money?
3. In interviews, Takako Ishimitsu of Café Neko argues as her counterparts in Japan do that she caters to individuals who cannot own cats because of restrictive rental policies or because of allergies. Ms. Ishimitsu apparently relied a great deal on her knowledge of Japan—on anecdotal evidence—a limited empirical research method. Is an entrepreneur's hunch enough on which to start a business?

ⁱ Uncertain future for Japan's cat cafes. (2012, April 17). Agence France-Press. Retrieved from <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/04/17/uncertain-future-for-japans-cat-cafes/1d7>

ⁱⁱ Scenario is based on several BBC articles and other sources.