

THE BATTLE FOR THE BAY:
A CASE STUDY OF THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES' MOVE INTO
TAMPA TRIBUNE TERRITORY

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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The Tampa Bay area of Florida is one of a remaining few regions harboring intense competition between geographically proximal United States newspapers. The competition was intensified in 1987 after years of maintaining a fairly cordial relationship when The St. Petersburg Times expanded across the Bay into Hillsborough County and began publishing a zoned edition for residents of Tampa. The Tampa Tribune responded by starting an edition in Pinellas County, home of The St. Petersburg Times.

A review of the various aspects of the competition shows that the implications of the fight have been varied and that much to the surprise of The St. Petersburg Times, The Tampa Tribune has proven to be a worthy competitor. Much of the literature downplays the possibility for two directly competing newspapers to maintain profitability, but such has been the case for these two newspapers. The St. Petersburg Times has placed great emphasis on competitive strategy, approaching issues such as defining the Tampa Bay area and attempting to provide the readers with what they want

and need in a newspaper. The Tampa Tribune has responded in a similar fashion, spending an estimated \$47 million on new equipment alone. Neither paper has emerged as the victor and the battle has continued at an increasing rate of intensity.

The St. Petersburg Times' present research and plans for the future reveal a predisposition to stay in the fight. This study reviews these plans in the context of rationale for expansion, effects of the competition to date, response of The Tampa Tribune and expectations for the future of the war based on analysis of demographic characteristics of Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties.

Information from interviews with management on both sides suggests that quality of newswriting and reporting for both The St. Petersburg Times and The Tampa Tribune has increased. Definitive results, in the opinion of leaders at both newspapers as well as the researcher, end here. The degree of certainty felt by each newspaper regarding its ability to win the competition seems to have declined.

The researcher concludes that the 1992 recession has played a significant role in delaying potential profitability for The St. Petersburg Times in Hillsborough County due to decreased population growth as compared with expected growth. Although it is likely The St. Petersburg Times is fighting a war which will not end or prove profitable in the next decade, this delay is not necessarily a permanent situation, therefore managerial focus on the competition must remain at least as intensive and as much a priority as it is at present. Finally, in the sense of journalistic excellence, readers will continue to be the beneficiaries of the competition due to the desire and effort of each newspaper to publish a superior product.