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Industry Bulletin From The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit

## A Need for Market Insight: LAROCQUE INC, Influence HR Acquired

The Starr Conspiracy's purchase driven by vendor dissatisfaction with current market analysis during a period of industry transition

By Steve Smith, TSCIU Chief

FORT WORTH, Texas (March 18, 2014) — Today, The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit announced the acquisition of LAROCQUE INC and its signature event, InfluenceHR. All of the details can be read in the [press release](#) — there's no need to recap those things here. But it is important to explain this move in the context of where the industry is now.

George LaRocque and InfluenceHR matter because technology companies need somewhere to turn to better understand themselves, their target market, their differentiation, and how to connect with what we call their radical buyer. HR technology companies are hungry for insight in a rapidly shifting market, and the traditional industry analyst model is not meeting their needs. Why?

- **HR technology vendors want access to thought leadership, research, and great content** without paying stiff membership costs that deliver nonexistent, nebulous, or inadequate ROI and business value.
- **HR technology vendors want an understanding of sales and marketing from people who have been there.** They want perspective and respect from peers who have marketed and sold software, scaled teams, and sustained growth in this market. They want to leverage the vantage point of someone who has seen myriad HR and HCM technology solutions through a marketer's eyes.
- **HR technology vendors want a fresh, distinct point of view – based on current research and grounded in subject-matter expertise – about where the market is heading,** how they should respond, what their place is within the market, and how they communicate their value to the market through brand, message, position, and promotion. The status quo approach is out of date, not evolving fast enough (or in some cases at all), and not keeping up with market demand.
- **HR technology vendors want someone to trust.** Analysts have sometimes drifted quickly through this market. Vendors invest time, energy, and money developing relationships with those analysts only to see them leave the market, or worse, go to work at a competing vendor. That doesn't sit well with anyone who has shared their innermost secrets about product roadmaps, financials, customers, and business models. Example from a recent conversation with a marketing executive when asked how they handle analyst relations: "How do we handle it? Easy. Tell our people, 'Don't talk to them.'"



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In this environment, the HR technology vendor community needs a George LaRocque, someone who has been a sales and marketing executive in cloud HR software and who understands the technology and how brands can and should access the market. In his capacity as conference chair at InfluenceHR, he will continue to build this event into the premier exchange of ideas, innovation, and next practices for sales and marketing executives in HR technology.

## A different model is needed for market analysis

We're in a period of transition from a dominant model of HR and talent management technology focused on automation, top-down processes, and centralized decision-making. Most analyst firms are inexorably wed to working in this world. They helped advance the integrated talent suite based on their coverage of well-established technology categories and their work with the vendors racing for market share, selling software that essentially mapped manual processes to software.

The race was all about who would build an integrated talent platform with the largest market share. Well, we answered that question. So what's next? Unlike a decade ago, when the essential thrust of every major vendor's product roadmap was aimed at the vision of integration, today there's much less consensus and a much greater field of innovation at work in HCM technology.

- **The last time around, the winners were the best-executed brands, not necessarily the best technology solutions.** The name of the game was market share. When you're looking to win your market, brand matters. Branding done well gives buyers the ability to navigate the market with speed and precision in order to meet their own needs at the velocity of business today.
- **The next time around, the winners will be the radical innovators that connect with radical buyers.** The radical buyer is someone who aligns with your brand on an emotional and values level. The Honeycomb™, The Starr Conspiracy's unconventional marketing model, channels the power of obsession into effective messages, brands, and promotions to access your target market.
- **Brands need market analysis.** Our focus is actually not on the technology, nor the practice of doing HR as such, but on the interactions that happen when markets get created and work efficiently. Brands (with a Big B) provide an essential way for buyers to navigate the array of choices offered in the market.

Marketing is not a one-way street. Marketing is about listening, collaborating, and conversing rather than talking at audiences. To accomplish these goals, you need to understand the market through rigorous research, cogent analysis, and strategic recommendations geared towards the needs of marketers and brands.



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## Market Analyst, Not Product or Practice Analyst

LaRocque and his Intelligence Unit colleague, Lance Haun, conduct briefings regularly with industry-leading companies, startups, and organizations at every stage in between.

"I view what I've been doing at LAROCQUE INC – and what TSCIU has been doing – as different than other analysts in our space," said LaRocque. "We focus on the market. Everyone else focuses primarily on either the technology product or the practice of HR or learning. They can tell you which product to buy or drive feature and function discussions or help end users be better at their jobs. We're looking at technology and innovation, its impact on users, and how companies go to market. We're focused on sales and marketing and helping them truly understand their buyers."

Understanding buyers has never been more important for brands, which is why the idea of the radical buyer is so necessary right now. **Every brand has a radical buyer who is unique to it – they align with your culture and your values.** They are predisposed to favor you and advocate for you in the sales process and to be great long-term customers. Your radical buyers likely have a different view of their role, their profession, and their technology than often stereotyped and monolithic "HR buyer." As Director of Go-To-Market Services, LaRocque will help brands – both clients and non-clients – understand how to access their market and speak to their radical buyer.

## InfluenceHR and the future of HR technology marketing

HR technology sales and marketing leaders spend a lot of time attending events and generating content that helps their prospective buyers and end users do their jobs better. That's the heart and soul of thought leadership: Give away knowledge that delivers value to your audience, challenges their assumptions, and prepares them for the future. LaRocque has created an event that delivers true thought leadership and started an essential conversation for the sales and marketing people in this space.

There are so many trends that require better understanding and comprehension: the next generation of sales and marketing automation, demand-generation best practices, content marketing, brand development, digital media and advertising, Net Promoter Score, customer success, customer advocacy, and social media, to name a few. LaRocque has done an exceptional job of creating this event. In acquiring InfluenceHR, The Starr Conspiracy aims to continue building on his great work.

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### **About The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit**

There's a new era of enterprise technology that can finally unleash the full promise of human potential. If you're on board, we're ready to get you there.

The Starr Conspiracy Intelligence Unit (TSCIU) delivers growth-oriented strategy, research, and advisory services, providing the guidance and key insights you need to grow market share and increase profitability. Let's face it: The protectors of the status quo in marketing fall back on outdated formulas that won't deliver growth and aren't sustainable. We've seen it before, and that approach to marketing is dead.

TSCIU takes your business as personally as you do, and we will challenge you to shift your perspective. Most important, though, we deliver marketing clarity so you can make decisions with confidence.