



Florence company joins with Fortune 500 firm

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FLORENCE - Operating out of a nondescript house on West Evans Street, few would recognize HillSouth for what it is: A major player in information technology.

The company, started by Robbie Hill in 1999 when he was 16 years old, HillSouth is partnering with CDW, a company that generated \$6.3 billion in sales last year. HillSouth will provide technical services to CDW's customers.

The move is mutually beneficial to both companies, Hill said.

"My customers will get the service of a locally owned company, and the benefits of the advanced logistics of a Fortune 500 company," he said. "The whole idea behind it is that we both realized we could help each other.

"What they cared about was that South Carolina was an underserved market, and now they have a company they can rely on to serve their customers here."

The partnership is a huge move for the small company once thought of as a novelty. When Hill formed the company, he generated much attention as a teen-aged entrepreneur. But he has parlayed that interest into a thriving IT business that is taken seriously.

Hill, 23, said he faced plenty of opposition when calling on potential clients when he started.

"When we first started, we were all over the place," he said. "We were selling computer equipment, we were doing Web design and networking, but now we're more focused on providing solutions to our clients."

That focus has helped Hill attract a loyal base of customers, some of whom might have started doing business with him just to help out a youth. Now those customers have looked past the novelty of a teen-owned business.

"When you have customers like Webster Rogers, Pee Dee Electric Cooperative and ERA Leatherman Realty standing behind you, it helps alleviate the feeling some customer might have about us being a small company," Hill said. "CDW saw through the fact that we're a small company."

Hill said his company and CDW will include each others' branding, with HillSouth's logos on all CDW marketing literature and CDW's logo branded on HillSouth's.

He said he has informed all his customers of the new partnership and response has been good.

"As I've talked to our customers, they've been overwhelmingly supportive of the move," he said. "They understand they need to do business with a local company, but they also need the buying power of a company like CDW."

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