

Turnkey opening Iranian doors

Colonie firm part of effort that uses Internet to defeat government censorship

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COLONIE -- Adam Wills isn't involved in Iranian politics, but about a week ago, he became part of the turmoil there.

Wills' company, Turnkey Internet Inc. in Colonie, was recently hired by Austin Heap, a San Francisco Web guru trying to help Iranians circumvent online government censorship with new software called Haystack.

Haystack uses computer servers outside of Iran as "proxy" servers, allowing Internet users in Iran to anonymously visit Web sites like Twitter and Facebook that are being blocked by the government to keep news from getting out of the country. Those efforts have intensified following the uprising after the disputed June 12 election.

Heap is renting server space from Turnkey, which has a data storage office on Airline Drive with racks and racks of servers that host Web sites and e-mail systems, many of them belonging to small businesses, around the clock.

He said Monday that the request from Heap for server space was a surprise, and now he's proud to promote the spread of democracy, even if only in a small way.

"I've seen the same thing on the news like everybody else," Wills said during an interview at his office. "We're not a political company, but you root for (Heap) to succeed. The social media sites, that's the way they're communicating."

Heap, who created Haystack along with Daniel Colascione, a software developer in Buffalo, said price and geography were big factors in choosing Turnkey, which charges between \$30 and \$400 a month for server space.

"They certainly fell in the best value category," Heap said Monday by e-mail. "Because of the nature of the project, we have to spread our servers across the globe."

Wills, 35, didn't just stumble into the Web hosting business. After his freshman year at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, Wills helped to launch a dial-up Internet service provider called The Global One that was later changed its name to Global 2000. That company was sold in 1999.

Wills was later a business partner in Voiceral Communications, a digital telephone company based in Menands. He started Turnkey in 2003, and has been growing the business ever since. He sold his stake in Voiceral last year.

Wills says Heap contacted the company after seeing one of its advertisements, but he's not surprised about getting such a far-flung request because the company has been growing an international client base. The cost of server space in the United States is significantly cheaper than it is abroad, he said.

And Wills cut his prices when the economic meltdown occurred last fall, hoping to replace lost business.

The gamble worked, and he has been adding server capacity ever since. The company is now up to nine people, including three recent hires. Its customer base is up 25 percent over last year. Wills is also getting ready to launch a new Web conference service called Voxwire.

"We're bucking the trend," Wills said. "We're buying our way out of the recession."

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