



## Law Meets Tech

*2015 Alumni Fellow Hewett blends law and technology for great results.*

It's hard to overestimate the value of foresight — seeing what's coming long before anyone else can. It's what turns ordinary people into business phenoms. **Jeff Hewett, '95**, seems to have the gift. Well before computers arrived in every home and office, before students ditched notepads in favor of laptops, Hewett could foresee the ways technology would make day-to-day tasks easier. He came to Washburn Law with a bachelor's in computer science, and a plan to marry his knack for computers with a solid understanding of the law.

Two decades later, that's just what he's done. In 2004, Hewett founded Granite Legal Systems — a legal software and discovery services company — and began building it from the ground up. Fast-forward to today, and CEO Hewett now manages 22 employees, in both Houston (where he's based)

and New York. Granite simplifies life for pharmaceutical, medical-device, and energy companies by sorting through masses of legal information and making it usable.

"The legal industry has a specific terminology and language that is used. The technology industry has specific terms and language that they use," Hewett said. "Being able to translate between the two and to effectively communicate with lawyers, I think, has been key to the success."

Hewett's fluency in both languages has earned him a niche in the market — and a spot as Washburn Law's 2015 Alumni Fellow. The Washburn University Alumni Fellows program annually honors graduates who have made a splash in their respective fields, including one from Washburn Law.



“I was surprised to receive recognition for where we are now, because we still have a lot further to go,” Hewett, who’s active with alumni in Houston, said. “But I was appreciative of the law school recognizing the progress that we’ve made so far.”

When Hewett returned to campus Nov. 12 and 13 to share his wisdom with students, he had a lot to say — about growing a business, staying true to your mission, and the absolute importance of people. These are lessons he’s been collecting since his law school days.

Back then, Hewett became fast friends with classmate **Terence O’Malley, ’95**. The two bonded over an interest in media, even founding the Communications Law Society together. Before long, they were collaborating on an epic first project right after graduation from Washburn Law: a death penalty case.

“I was working for a lawyer who had a huge, monstrous criminal law case with some 14,000 pages of surveillance transcribed. And I was basically given the task of trying to figure out how to manage that,” said O’Malley, principal shareholder of The O’Malley Law Firm in Kansas City, Mo. “I knew that Jeff knew how to do those things. He helped me essentially make sense out of these thousands of pages of documents — organize them, categorize them, cross-reference them.”



O’Malley saw Hewett’s ingenuity from the start.

“He was always helping me to organize my notes and introduce me to new software. From the moment he got to law school, really, he was just very much focused on how digital technology was going to revolutionize the practice of law,” O’Malley said.

“He is running a thriving company, and he is really proof positive of what a legal education can do, even if you don’t actively practice the law. In that regard, I think he stands out as a person who really went after his dreams, but did it his own way.”

Even though he knew from the outset what his goal was, Hewett didn’t just leap without planning. He did the legwork. He cut his teeth by opening a Houston office for Austin company InfoEdge Technology, using software he learned at Washburn Law. Then he racked up seven years with Baker Robbins & Company (now HBR CONSULTING), a leading legal technology consultant. Including law school, he spent a grand total of 13 years laying the groundwork for Granite.

In a field that’s hyperfocused on speed, his patience is refreshing.

“We’re 11 years into Granite. I call us the tortoise of the industry; we’re slow and steady,” Hewett said.

“It took me a long time to start my company. I had to know that I had a source of revenue to fund a software development project, and confidence in the idea that it would be successful and would be useful in the marketplace. I knew what we wanted to do, and we have remained focused on providing those services. We have varied very little from our initial mission, and I think that has served us well.”

When Hewett made his way to campus in November, it was with all that experience in his back pocket. The heart of his message to students was clear: Whatever your title, people come first.

“Our first client that Granite ever had is still our client. The approaches that have helped us maintain our relationships with our clients are the same approaches that law students would use in a legal environment as well. It’s about people. It’s not just about marketing and services; it’s about the personal relationships you develop and how you maintain those.”