MAKING A Global Impact

During the 11 years that he ran Timeplex Inc., he turned a struggling company into a leading provider of T1-based networks and one of the first to use microprocessors in its systems. In 1988, Botwinick had increased the company’s total market capitalization from approximately $3 million to a whopping $440 million before selling Timeplex to technology giant Unisys.

Timeplex was Botwinick’s highest-profile business deal but not his first. “I did it several times so I must’ve enjoyed it,” he says with a laugh.

After graduating from Columbia Engineering, Botwinick went to work for US Semiconductor Corp. In 1960, he cofounded chip-maker Silicon Transistor Corp., a company that went public and was eventually sold. From 1963 through 1967, he served as president and principal shareholder of Quantum Inc. and its associated group of international companies.

He went on to specialize in high-technology investment research and venture capital as a vice president of investment research at Goldman Sachs. He left Goldman in 1977 to run Timeplex as chairman and CEO, eventually retiring from his position as president of Unisys Networks in 1989, one year after the Unisys-Timeplex deal. Since then, he has continued to invest in and advise small technology companies in, and as he puts it, “whatever keeps me interested.”

A self-proclaimed geek, Botwinick has always enjoyed building things. Electronics and technology captivated him the most as a student. Thinking back to his Columbia days, Botwinick credits Jacob Millman’s course in digital electronics as a particular favorite.

“I remember building a piece of electronic equipment in his lab that came pretty close to state of the art,” says Botwinick. “Professor Millman said, ‘I think that’s beyond what you can do,’ but I got it to work. I was pretty proud of that.”

When Botwinick returned to the Engineering School as the Class Day keynote speaker in May of 1985, the former University Trustee urged the new graduates to “come back often to Columbia, in person and in thought,” and said, “whatever the form of your contribution, do give back to Columbia more than you have received. For only if you systematically do so can the cycle repeat.”

He has lived by these words. Botwinick is one of Columbia Engineering’s most generous donors. Over the past 20 years, he has made numerous contributions, including more than $1 million to establish the Botwinick Multimedia Learning Laboratory, which has revolutionized the first-year engineering curriculum since its inception in 1994. With Botwinick’s steady support, the lab has been re-equipped three times, maintaining its state-of-the-art capabilities. He was instrumental in securing a $25 million grant from the National Science Foundation to establish the National Center for Telecommunications Research at the School and also headed the fundraising effort for the Schapiro Center for Engineering and Physical Science Research (CEPSR). He continues to sit on the advisory board of Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory as well as the Board of Overseers of the Duke Cancer Institute.

“I’ve always felt it was important to give back,” says Botwinick. “If people who are successful don’t give back, they fail to plant the seed that brings out the next generation.”

EDWARD BOTWINICK BS’58, BA’56CC

High-Tech Pioneer

Veteran technology business leader Edward Botwinick helped pioneer the voice/data communications market long before users and businesses were able to connect over multiple high-speed networks simultaneously.