

Valve Accessories & Controls: Quality,

"As the 'brains' of the control valve package, this instrument is unique since it measures valve stem/actuator position and then performs a key function – it actually moves the control valve. Other instruments that measure flow, levels, etc. that only measure, they do not perform," explained Wayne Fleming. "Most positioners are currently sold by major valve companies as an accessory. They use their large installed base of valves to sell their positioners and seldom market them as a stand-alone instrument. We are a unique company that has found solid success against the Goliaths of our industry. That is something that does not just happen – it is developed."

VAC takes a very different position on the positioner market, by only marketing valve positioners and the accessories to support those primary products. Founded in 2001, VAC has built a strong business over the past decades with their European counterparts, producing a universal design that can be mounted and calibrated to a high percentage of any and all valves and actuators.

Wayne believes that VAC's market strengths are independence, service, quality and celebrating the unique personalities of his talented team. As a privately held entity, VAC is not controlled by a large board, which allows for decisions to be made quickly and with full support. Focusing on their complete line of positioners ensures that the company is not competing with their core customer base.



Valve Accessories and Controls (VAC) designs, manufactures and markets quality products for controlling actuators in various flow control markets. The simple, but rugged products incorporate many years of direct industry experience, coupled with a genuine interest in customer feedback and satisfaction.

Valve World Americas had the pleasure of visiting VAC's Chelsea, Alabama facility to meet with CEO Wayne Fleming, President Randy Estes, General Manager Scott Kratz and Office Manager Cheryl Snead to discuss the company's commitment to providing a complete quality package that begins with a solid product design, quality construction and ends with a very satisfied customer.

By Sarah Bradley

Setting the Bar in Service

Carrying high levels inventory allows the company to be proactive in delivering speed-of-service and helping meet and exceed their customer's needs with immediacy and integrity. The company knows that their customers have many choices and they work "smart" to make their choice VAC products. VAC's simple straightforward approach to their product carries over to how they work with customers and their employees. Wayne considers the company's talented team members as its greatest attributes.

"Our key to success is to hire exceptional people, give them the tools and

knowledge they need to be successful and then get out of their way," he quipped. "We definitely have a team-oriented structure that has information that many companies would choose to keep confidential shared within the team in a growth-oriented environment. Our very short policy manual is not geared toward "restrictions," but toward how to treat customers with respect and how to be fair and balanced. We answer questions within hours; sometimes minutes and we ship most of our orders within 24 hours. Service, integrity, respect and a positive workplace environment, are at the core of our day-to-day business."

Wayne uses a well-known analogy in reference to his approach to business, believing that positive reinforcement always inspires people to work for a common goal while negativity only deters loyalty and perseverance.

"I have always managed with a 'carrot versus a stick' method – good leaders are not the ones who do the greatest things, but the ones that get good people to do the greatest things," he revealed. "Our people are customer-driven, we work quickly to help our customers by saying what we can do and then actually doing what we say."

Positioned for Success

"The V100 was the first product that we introduced. It has been around a long time, it still has a lot of followers. We have customers that are happy with the design as it is and recognizes it as a tested and true product for their applications," said Wayne. "We can hardly keep them on the shelf!"

Known for its durability, the V100 is constructed of cast Aluminum with polyester housing that is NEMA 4X rated, all stainless steel retained fasteners, a thick stainless steel cam that is double locked with sturdy cam nut and the bottom plate helps absorb vibration. Screwdriver slots in the span and zero ferrules, along with an external zero adjustment, helps make setting up the positioner simple. Special cams, range springs, various pilots, spindles (drive connectors), gauges, dome indicators, and position feedback are examples of the options that are available from VAC. In addition, special requests are welcomed and encouraged as the team

thrives on the opportunity to help customers with any application need. The V100 features one housing for pneumatic or electro-pneumatic, where I/P can be installed, removed or converted at any time, while still mounted on the actuator. The V100 has various mounting capabilities – rotary or linear. The standard indicator can be reversed to direct or reverse acting and always show the proper scale (0-100%).

The compact NEMA 4X V200 valve positioner series allows for an internal I/P, switches, 4/20 mA transmitter, all in one compact, rugged die-cast aluminum housing. With the flexibility to add, remove, replace and calibrate, this unit is very user-friendly. The ability to calibrate a positioner is important. Time can be money, and with the V200 positioner, calibration is made simple, easy, and NOT time-consuming. Both Zero and Span can be adjusted without removing the cover, and the single spring has very little interaction. Being able to get all of the needed options from a single product can be a real benefit. As the need for valve position feedback grows, the V200 positioner allows for very accurate feedback options. From switches to 4/20 transmitter, these components fit very neatly and simply into the one NEMA 4X housing. The flexible mounting allows for mounting to many actuators, built in gauge block, various pilot assemblies, special cams, beacon indicator, and more are available from one source-one product.

"Our engineers are perfectionists and they believe that a product can always be better, so they are always tweaking it and improving it to where the V200 can match the base level performance



Modular V200 positioner

Service & a Positive Attitude Matters

of a digital positioner," revealed Wayne. "If you think about a valve package, you have the control element which is the valve, you have the actuator which is the muscle and then the positioner which is the brains. Each of these publish a small margin of error, when combined you try to reduce the margins with quality components and accessories. The latest in positioner technology is available in the D400 and D500 digital series valve positioners. These microprocessor-based products are available with a very extensive list of features and benefits. Nema 4X is standard and IS and EX products are available in the D400 model. The D500 offers "advanced diagnostics," SIL II approvals as well as "emergency shut down" option. VAC stocks these products with Hart communication and a variety of accessories and mounting kits.

"We offer both analog and digital positioners because some customers prefer the ease of analog, as it provides the basic information/performance with ease and low cost maintenance in the field. Digital products tend to provide more in-depth information. Our D400 and D500 units are high-end digital products. They have pressure sensors and special software for analytics and work on the protocols such as HART, Fieldbus and Profibus," explained Randy Estes. "We are constantly investing in R&D and finding ways to enhance the performance of our products and listen to the needs of our customers to help make our products work for them."

A key market that VAC identifies as "Retrofit" involves informing and educating all levels of distribution, and end users of the wide variety of mounting options for all VAC products. Out of date,



V200 on DeZurik



D500 on a Fisher Control Valve



Ready to ship inventory in Chelsea, AL



State of the art training facility

discontinued, or overpriced competitor products can easily be "retrofitted" with a new VAC positioner. Usually at a very competitive price with excellent service and support.

Product testing is performed at all points in the process—from design prototyping to component testing, to assembly and to individual calibration testing. Each unit is tested to ensure a customer receives exactly what they are paying for. Additional testing is performed in conjunction with specific applications and troubleshooting, providing customers with detailed reports to help improve customer communication and education.

"Many OEM valve companies and more importantly some of their big end user customers ask for a valve package to meet a specific performance testing. They receive all the material or construction specs and additional specs to prove a package meets performance test requirements confirming that this valve package as a whole is going to perform at a very high level," explained Wayne. "We are one of the few pneumatic analog positioners that can meet those test requirements."

Investing in Inventory

With the manufacturing arm of the business located in Sweden, sales of VAC's positioners have experienced growth on a global scale. "Wayne compares the positioner business to a snowball – once you get momentum going that snowball just keeps rolling and gets bigger and bigger, provided you continue the high level of support and focus. Due to our sales efforts here in the United States, our positioners have made it to Europe and people are no-

ting. Eventually it is snowballing and sales have been increasing in Europe and Asia as well," said Randy.

Selling through stocking distributors and OEM customers in North, Central and South America, VAC relies heavily on the strength and commitment of their channel distribution partners. A key aspect of marketing their product is inventory. VAC has a network of stocking distributors that support the local markets where they are located and serve. Additional factory inventory is maintained in their Distribution Center in Chelsea (Birmingham) Alabama and locations in Europe, where complete assemblies and spare parts are always "a day away." This is an important aspect of the company's responsive service philosophy.

"We provide financial incentives to have distributors stock positioners and mounting kits on hand to supply to smaller OEMs, as well as end users," said Randy. "Our business has a healthy ratio of distribution to OEM sales, as both of these groups have aided VAC in developing a very nice MRO base. We promote a strong market potential that we call "The Retrofit" market of replacing existing positioners with our complete product offering and positioner and mounting kit inventory.

Looking to the Future

With the steady growth the company has experienced, VAC recently underwent a management reorganization

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last year and an additional expansion of their facility with a major emphasis on a first-class Training Center.

"With the building of our new training center, we can have people come in for in-class training and in our mounting and calibration area, they receive hands on experience for a "well rounded" product experience, explained Randy. "We believe the best way to learn is to get out there and get your hands on the product. It helps people to fully understand the flexibility behind the product, when they have an issue and we are able to fully demonstrate the capabilities – it becomes real."

VAC is going to continue to focus on the important qualities that make the company unique – staying true to their core values, maintaining product and personal integrity and valuing their customers.

"We build relationships because of our products, but also because of who we are. A lot of my friends are my customers now and vice versa. That is the most important part and it speaks to who we are as a company and how we want to position ourselves in the industry," Randy said. "Our relationships with our customers are the most important thing and we believe it sets us apart from the bigger, nameless, faceless companies out there. We always want to find ways to do better by the customer. We want to work with them not just to make a sale, but to find a solution. The same thing goes for our distributor network. If you build that rapport and invest time in developing that relationship, they will care about you, your product and properly serving your customers."

While Wayne may begin to step back from the business side (gradual retirement) in the future, the new management team is determined to preserve the unique culture that they have built. Recognizing that VAC is something special, they are ensuring that the company remains true to its roots by remaining independent, accessible and reliable.

"Wayne is a huge asset to the company and the industry as a whole, but I respect that he wants to take some time for himself and I think he should. The future is extraordinarily bright and I think we are placed perfectly in the market to continue our growth," concluded Randy. "This snowball is getting bigger and it just keeps rolling. We have the right people, the right products and I have full confidence that moving forward, only good things are going to happen."

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the profiled company and do not reflect the position of Valve World Americas.