

UniTorq – Growing Through Innov

For over 25 years, UniTorq has been a dedicated source for cutting-edge and reliable actuators and accessories. Offering a complete line of valve automation solutions with an experienced support team to guide customers with selection, installation and project support, UniTorq maintains its founding principle to this day: to develop innovative valve actuation solutions that meet (and often exceed) the unique needs of its customers. Valve World Americas had the pleasure of speaking with UniTorq President, Jack Curtin, to discuss the company's evolution amid a resoundingly successful business year.



By Kelly McLaughlin & Sarah Bradley

Having grown to become one of the largest pneumatic actuator brands in the world (with no signs of slowing down), President Jack Curtin explains that it is an understatement to say that UniTorq's customer-oriented philosophy has served the company considerably well. Since 1991, UniTorq has provided commercial and industrial markets with intelligent, innovative solutions — and its performance over the past year was no exception to this reputation. UniTorq has provided reliable, go-to products to a wide variety of industries, including oil, gas & fracking, pharmaceutical, food & beverage, refining, marine, chemical & petrochemical, power generation and water & wastewater sectors, among others.

Established as a distributor of automation products in 1991, the company formed a relationship with Gianni Trevisan in Milan, Italy and began to represent the manufacturer's products in the United States and Canada under the UniTorq name. In 2015, UniTorq went on to create new American jobs and took greater control of the process when it began to source and assemble its own product, with machining, finishing and testing being conducted straight from its Georgia facility.

In terms of approach, UniTorq cuts no corners when it comes to quality — maintaining consistency in both quality and capabilities is a priority from which they never stray. "If you say your product offers a thousand inch pounds of torque, in ten years, that same model has to deliver that same torque. We have one of the few testing benches that can really test torque, which is typically tested theoretically. However, we have the capability of not only stating 'theoretically' what the torque mea-

sures, but we can now back up those claims by testing to the actual value," said Jack.

As an ISO certified company, when it comes to evaluating whether or not they are meeting the standards that they are intent on delivering, UniTorq's mandate is to gauge quality by performance. Every product is quality-tested at the factory — and then a second time at the warehouse — before a UniTorq label is placed on the product. With such a painstaking manufacturing process — one that strives for continuous improvements and implements exhaustive performance testing — Jack has confidence in his assessment that UniTorq's products meet or exceed all applicable standards before they leave the facility. In order to best decide what the future of pneumatic actuation has in store for the company, UniTorq commits to keeping a finger on the pulse of industry trends and innovations.



"Being part of technical associations and groups that focus on valve and valve processing helps us forecast what is happening in the industry and remain aware of any technical requirements. In 1991, our actuator was an engineered product but has developed into more of a commodity product, like a bronze gate valve or a butterfly valve. We acknowledge that it is now a commodity product, but we are competing in the market by producing our products domestically and insisting on the highest quality," Jack reported. "We

have been in the valve industry for a long time and to ensure that actuator quality did not decline, we knew there were some changes that needed to be implemented."

UniTorq decided to take things a step further by not only delivering on demands, but raising the bar for quality within the industry as a whole. Between being go-to problem solvers for its customers by providing unparalleled expertise and contributing entirely new technologies to the industry, it seems evident that UniTorq will not soon fall behind on deliverables.

Setting (and Exceeding) Standards

When it comes to UniTorq's notion of its role in the industry, they are of the opinion that in order to maintain a high-quality product at an affordable price for its clients, the work has to come directly from them. "It would have been very easy for us to go to the Pacific Rim and buy a finished product to put our name on, but that was not our goal," explained Jack Curtin. "Our goal is to give our customers the best possible product. We do import some of our components; however, the finished product is always inspected by our quality controller to ensure that the high standards that we insist upon internally as an ISO 9001:2008 certified company are continually met." UniTorq offers one of the broadest product portfolios in the industry — featuring pneumatic and electric actuators, accessories — and controls — to which it has recently made significant additions.

UniTorq has experienced nothing short of significant recent growth — 22%, in fact. The year 2017 saw the industry powerhouse through a dynamic series of developments. Not least among them being its dramatic increase in revenue, continued growth and expansion into South America and Europe, as well as three sizeable projects with electric actuators for high-speed quarter turn electrics and multi-turns. Throughout the many opportunities on the horizon, however, UniTorq's top priority has remained consistent: delivering outstanding service to its customers.

Navigating New Territories

UniTorq was fortunate, Jack mentioned, to have had the opportunity to receive the aforementioned projects

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through a European valve manufacturer whom they met at Valve World. The first of the incoming projects was the Azkonobel project, in which UniTorq sold the actuators for purposes of application and further sale to the distributors and contractors. Second in line came the Hudson Bay contracts, in which UniTorq took part from inception to launch. "We were involved from the contractor-engineering and procurement all the way through," Jack explains, adding that it involved "specifying the electric actuation, the design of the failsafe, supporting our distributor in the engineering, construction and design, as well as assisting the distributor with presentations on engineering to show capabilities and new possibilities of process control."

Beyond its national portfolio, UniTorq's expansion into South America has presented the opportunity to become more directly involved with its vast customer base situated there. To start with, the expansion allowed UniTorq to supply to one chemical project in Brazil and another in Chile — though engineered in Houston, the projects were sold



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through South American distribution companies. These projects involved two power plant retrofits — the companies already possessed the valves, but they needed explosion-proof actuators in a quick turn-around. The valves were sent to a facility in Houston for repair, after which the repaired valves were sent to UniTorq in order for the electric actuators to be applied, because “we could provide them with a quick turn-around,” indicated Jack. UniTorq was able to meet such a quick turnaround due to its readily-available stock and diverse inventory — from there, it was a matter of adapting the actuators internally to the valves. Overall, the process was completed “basically overnight.” Not long after, a second project came its way — but this time, it was 15 valves with a demand for an equally-quick turnaround. Known for its efficiency, UniTorq seamlessly delivered on time.

Further to its global market ventures, UniTorq expanded into uncharted project territory when a damper manufacturer in North Carolina awarded them a bio-agricultural facility project being run through Kansas State University. The project involves protecting crops and vegetables from possible contamination in the outdoors by growing them inside, thus preventing them from being subjected to outside elements. Moving forward with the project, how-

ever, was no simple task. It necessitated that an intricate process be followed in order to receive approval from Homeland Security — not to mention the many technicalities that followed such approval. With UniTorq at the helm, however, progression ran smoothly. “I would consider being able to get that project to be a pretty good badge of honor,” expressed Jack.

With its sights set on 2019 and beyond, UniTorq is looking into expanding its electric actuator capabilities with a new facility. “As our electric actuator business grows, we realize that we need to be able to do in the Gulf Coast what we do here in Atlanta: repair, expand and be able to adapt locally,” Jack mentioned. “We are looking at putting inventory into the Gulf Coast with electric and pneumatic actuators.” Primarily, however, and in true UniTorq fashion, its priority lies in being able to react to its customers as quickly as possible.

Product Innovations

Not one to stay stagnant, UniTorq recently added three larger Rack and Pinion sizes to its product line offering. “When it came to pneumatic actuators that fell on the smaller side (25,000-inch pounds or smaller), companies typically used a Rack and Pinion type actuator and gravitated towards a Scotch Yoke actuator on the larger

sizes,” Jack explained. “Regarding the economical choice between 25,000-30,000 and 50,000-75,000 inch-pounds is in a gray area. It comes down to the fact that when a customer wants to modulate a Scotch Yoke, it is a more difficult process than modulating a Rack and Pinion.”

In response, UniTorq introduced three new sizes to compete with each corresponding size in the Scotch Yoke line. The Rack and Pinions are able to modulate and they take less space. “We have been very successful in the three larger sizes that would typically fit into a Scotch Yoke size,” Jack divulged. “Now that users have access to larger Rack and Pinion actuators, they utilize them because of their size and modulating capabilities.”

Market Advancements

Recognizing the importance of corrosion protection, UniTorq is doing its part to advance accordingly. UniTorq has gained access to a new fluoropolymer coating for its aluminum actuators that provides greater corrosion protection than its competition. This offers a less expensive and less heavy alternative to the industry standard on corrosion resistant actuators — stainless steel. “It is significantly less expensive and less heavy than a stainless steel actuator, so we have been successful in performing quite a few applications,” Jack revealed. Even though they just introduced it, Jack indicated that it has already been successful, especially for customers in the food processing industry.

In addition, UniTorq is planning to develop new products for LNG and natural gas. The company’s decision to go into the market was brought forth by the need to equip its new Scotch Yoke offering with the seals and materials able to withstand the lower temperature common for these applications.

Regarding its limit switch offering, UniTorq recently received CSA approval — Class 1, in which they underwent the CSA standard for testing to explosion-proof. Jack notes that this allows them to be explosion-proof in both hazardous and semi-hazardous locations, with approval increasing from solely A and B to C, D, E, F and G. “This will mean



that our customers can utilize our limit switches for all explosion-proof applications,” Jack attested.

Last, but certainly not least, arose the subject of Jack’s recent health — and we are pleased to report that he is doing great. Jack assured us that he is back playing golf and has returned to work for duty. “I am too ornery to quit,” he quips. From its cutting-edge advancements over the past year to its continued trailblazing in the ones to come, solid prospects abound from all angles for UniTorq.



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