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Transforming an Industry
by **FOCUSING**
on the **CUSTOMER**



VanTran

TRANSFORMERS



In today's business world, it is essential for companies to listen to and communicate effectively with their customers. For over fifty years, VanTran Industries has designed and manufactured unique custom-made transformers delivered on time for its discerning clients. Now on the cusp of great growth, the company looks forward to expanding that model into the future.



Written by David H. Caldwell

VanTran Industries was founded in 1963 by a group of electrical engineers dissatisfied with the scope and availability of electrical transformers at the time. Led by company founder Al Bolin, these engineers foresaw the future urbanization of the American landscape and the growing demand for underground electrical services. In their view, the electrical industry was not supplying transformers to the full scope of market demand.

In the finest of entrepreneurial traditions, Bolin and the others decided to meet this need by filling it themselves. "They were just looking to do things on their own," Director of Sales & Marketing Doug Getson recalls of the company's founders. But those in that first generation could hardly imagine that their company would still be going strong over fifty years later. Al Bolin's son Don now leads the firm as chief executive officer, having risen to his current post after years of serving as a manufacturing representative for VanTran and other companies.

The company began in the small southern Illinois town of Vandalia, but quickly moved to Georgia and eventually settled in Waco, Texas, where it still operates today. Getson explains that the founders expected most of the company's business to



come from electrical utility companies; however, these clients wanted a high number of transformers for low prices, which for a small firm is not a long-term, sustainable business model.

“It was decided [VanTran] would size itself to be a unique, custom supplier of transformers.” Texas, with its prolific oil and gas sector, would provide excellent opportunities for the revised business model.

Today, VanTran continues its founders’ mission to provide quality transformers on time at shortest lead times. Its primary product line remains liquid-filled distribution-class transformers up to 10 Mega Volt Amp (MVA) base rating and primary voltages up to 35 kilovolts. The majority of its transformers are individually engineered and custom-made, and all are designed and manufactured at its Waco facility. While the company does not install or maintain the transformers, it has close associations with firms that do perform those services.

Today this Texas-based company is proud of its ongoing relationship with the oil and gas, petrochemical, mining and industrial sectors. With its smaller, leaner profile, VanTran caters to more discerning clientele with challenging design criteria, and these sectors value those parameters. Getson relates that the company’s reputation for reliability helps it work well with its clients. “We’re reliable in terms of our delivery as well as the quality of the product,” he explains with professional pride. “If we commit to a date, we’re going to make that date.”

“The company’s wide product range includes transformers for pole mount, pad mount, submersible and vault installations.”

Other repeat clients include electrical utility companies, but those companies more fitting with VanTran’s profile and production standards. “We’re not providing what I’d call a traditional utility-service transformer,” Getson explains. Like the oil and gas sector, these clients rely on the company to provide more advanced transformers than are typically available. Its wide product range includes transformers for pole mount, pad mount, submersible and vault installations.

Those advancements led to its market leadership with its VanTran Multi-Tap Generator Step Transformer (GSU) for the generator rental market. VanTran Multi-Tap is extremely versatile, able to step up a variety of generator voltages for large venue events, temporary power, disaster relief and other applications. ►►





► The VanTran Multi-tap accommodates many voltage types and offers versatility combined with VanTran's trademark quality and reliability. The robust but simple design is "able to withstand the rigors of transportation and doesn't require a lot of expansive knowledge to operate," as Getson describes. "That has become a very reliable and convenient product for those in the rental market."

The first generation of company engineers invested in higher-current, higher-capacity pad-mounted transformers, and this innovation continues to bear fruit. While these products provide the performance necessary for any client, they are tamper-proof, making them safe to be installed in public areas. These transformers are still available for purchase today, so clients receive the necessary electrical services in a safe enclosure.

"Growth is due in no small part to the company's continued customer devotion and open communication."

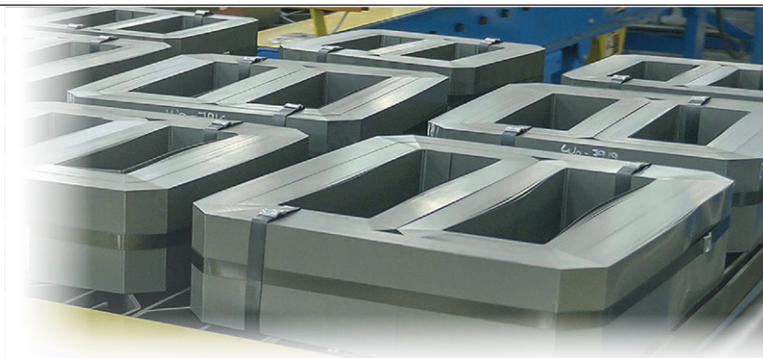


For industrial applications, the company ensures that its transformers can accommodate any type of medium and low voltage switchgear lineup, for either greenfield or brownfield development. VanTran can custom design its transformers to meet existing transformer footprint and switchgear interconnections. This alleviates time and expense for retrofitting a brownfield or existing installation; it becomes a plug-and-play installation, dramatically reducing the time for an outage to change out the existing transformer. This saves clients time and money.

VanTran's reach is well beyond Texas. The company has delivered transformers for offshore oil platform installations as far away as the coast of Africa and on-shore as far away as Russia and



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Philippines. The company has also delivered product to many Latin American countries. A bit closer to home, the company has delivered product to Canada and most all states in the United States.

As well as its considerable manufacturing and design aptitude, the company has a smaller, leaner structure that provides faster and better service. VanTran retains what Getson calls the 'old start-up' atmosphere enjoyed by its entrepreneurial founders. Despite having over eighty-five employees, the company maintains open, honest communication with little overhead.

"The big difference for us, and the attraction for us, is the speed and agility with which we can make decisions," Getson explains. While larger firms may take countless weeks to provide the technical options and documentation necessary before starting a project, "We can turn a request into a proposal within days."

In addition to this increased transparency and communications, the company is now engaging in more responsible environmental practices. It is a proud member of the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA), so it and fellow members have a voice in determining national efficiency, manufacturing, and safety standards.

VanTran's liquid-filled transformers can be supplied with petroleum-based mineral oil or biodegradable, vegetable-based ester fluids. "That's becoming more of a trend to supply transformers with ester fluids," Getson comments. As a bonus, esters actually have a higher fire point – critical for safety – and can extend the life of a transformer or allow for overload without loss of life.

These strides come in spite of VanTran's growing pains. "Like any business that's growing, the challenge there is to bring in the right talent," Getson states. The company is working hard to recruit qualified new hires from the next generation of business and engineering leaders. "It's always a challenge when

a company is coming up and growing, and we're working hard to make sure we don't falter on our value proposition – that customer-centricity."

As the company grows, Getson believes it will take on a larger role in the transformer manufacturing industry. "There's been, and there continues to be, consolidation in the transformer OEM industry," he explains, "and as that continues to happen, a company like VanTran will see its value proposition become stronger." This, he explains, will lead to an even greater demand for suppliers that can deliver on unique value propositions.

Getson firmly believes that growth is due in no small part to the company's continued customer devotion and open communication. "We don't think that's going to change. We think it's actually going to be more dominant."

As the market continues to consolidate, he says VanTran will continue to expand on this model. "It's going to be the way forward for us, and we think we can grow on that, without a problem." ■

Content Developed by Earle Fergusson | Designed by Yoana Ilcheva



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7711 Imperial Dr., Waco, TX 76712, USA | **P:** (254) 772-9740 | **E:** sales@vantran.com

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