

Garner Industries, Inc./BinMaster

PROVIDING CUSTOM BIN LEVEL SOLUTIONS FOR MORE THAN 60 YEARS

Level sensing is not a one-size-fits-all industry. That's the premise under which Lincoln, NE-based Garner Industries, Inc., better known in the grain world as BinMaster, operates. It's a philosophy that has served the company well for more than 60 years. Given how different customers' needs can be depending on whether they're moving corn vs. flour, or utilizing small vs. large bins, for example, it's also a principle that makes good business sense.

"That's one of the reasons why we offer so many different types of products and technologies," explains Scott McLain, president and CEO. "With product diversification, we don't need to sell what we have but can get you what you need. We're not afraid to tell customers that we don't have the right product to solve their problem."

That kind of honesty may seem counterintuitive to some. After all, who wants to turn away business? But it's indicative of the company's dedication to customer service, not just making the sale. In other words, taking the road less traveled has made all the difference, to paraphrase the late poet Robert Frost.

"Perhaps what I'm most proud of is our people and the way we service our customers. We feel that's something that really sets us apart," says McLain. "We



BinMaster's 75,000-sq.-ft. office and manufacturing facility just outside Lincoln, NE.

BINMASTER

still have a real person answer the telephone. We list our sales and tech support people on our web site, even with their pictures. For people on the go, we now have live chat on our website.

"Our culture is customer-centric, and it's our top priority to have the best customer service in the industry," he adds. "The BinMaster sales staff understands the challenges at grain operations from first-hand experience working in the field."

While supplying level indicators to the grain industry isn't exactly the stuff of poetry, Garner Industries' founder, Ed Garner, was what McLain refers to as a Renaissance Man of sorts.

"He was actually a very talented musician, and he was also a tool and die maker. He founded the company and went out on his own providing tool and die and job shop-type services for local manufacturers in the Lincoln area," he recalls.

In the mid-1960s, DeKalb Seed Company asked if the company could develop an automated bin level monitor, which it did. This single project gave birth to the BinMaster line of level control technologies, and the rest is history.

Today, BinMaster is a leading brand of level sensors serving not only the agriculture industry but also power, bioenergy, food manufacturing, chemicals, plastics, cement, mining, and wood products plants. The company operates a 75,000-sq.-ft. facility outside of Lincoln and exports its products to more than 30 countries worldwide, with more than 120 people on staff.



BinMaster key personnel: President/CEO Scott McLain, Vice President of Sales Todd Peterson, and Regional Sales Manager Nathan Grube.

Solutions, Not Products

Although BinMaster is diversified

across many markets, grain and ethanol continue to be the largest segments of its business. According to McLain, grain, seed, and feed are BinMaster's bread and butter, which makes sense based on where it's located, and what the company knows best, he says.

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What that means for customers is BinMaster can control the quality, it can make products faster, and it can customize them for specific applications.

As an example, McLain points to the various options the company can select for its rotary level indicators for point level control in grain bins. BinMaster can make all kinds of extensions in custom lengths, offer different mounting options, paddles, and stainless steel fittings for food-grade operations or corrosive molasses, he explains, noting that "at BinMaster, this isn't special order. It's the way we do business. And it's all done here in the USA, without long lead times," he adds.

BinMaster manufactures a variety of products including rotaries, capacitance probes, vibrating rods, and diaphragm switches. McLain says the rotary is the most popular point level indicator, because it is inexpensive, reliable, and easy to use. But with all of its custom extensions, BinMaster can make a rotary for just about any grain bin, he adds.

When it comes to inventory monitoring systems, BinMaster is best known for its flagship product, the SmartBob inventory management system. Available in two models – the



SmartBob continuous level sensor (above) and rotary level sensor.

SmartBob2 for bins up to 180 feet tall, and the SmartBob-TS1 designed for feed and ingredient bins up to 60 feet tall – these sensors act like an automated tape measures but eliminate the need for climbing to the top of the bin. Grain facility managers can set how frequently they want to measure the levels, and the SmartBob systems will take measurements twice a day, every two hours, or on demand – however often a customer needs them.

The data collected from the sensors can be sent to a control room PLC, a control console, or to a PC installed with the eBob software. BinMaster recently has offered a Cloud-based solution called BinView to monitor inventory, which provides 24/7 access available from multiple locations that have Internet connections.

Additionally, the company also introduced a 3DLevel-Scanner six years ago that has become very popular in the industry. With bins increasing in size and grain being piled unevenly, this product can scan, measure, and map uneven topography and then convert it to volume with very high accuracy.

"It's been a real winner in any bin with uneven topography and in big bins, where we install multiple scanners to measure the entire surface area," McLain explains. "Large grain operations, ethanol plants, and flour mills are big fans of scanner systems."

BinMaster isn't one to rest on its laurels, however, and is looking constantly for ways to provide the grain industry with innovative solutions. "We're always coming up with new products," McLain says.

For example, BinMaster introduced a new flow detection sensor in 2014 for a customer who wanted to detect a trickle flow to prevent cross-contamination. As a result, the company now offers the new FD-2000, a one-piece flow/no-flow device that was designed to solve the problem.

Another recent introduction in 2015 is a patent-pending, mercury-free tilt switch that mounts on top of a bin and sends an alert signal when tilted 15 degrees. "Our engineers came up with an innovative design that's simple, reliable, and inexpensive," McLain notes.

If that weren't enough, BinMaster also is getting into liquid level sensors for one reason: customer demand. "Customers kept asking us if they could tie their liquid tanks into ►



BinMaster workers assembly SmartBob level sensors.

their inventory monitoring system. Now they can. This is a big plus for coops and big facilities that also are storing or selling liquid fertilizers, oils, liquid ingredients, or even fuels," he says.

Double-digit Growth

Through continued innovation, McLain says the company is expecting double-digit growth annually and isn't shy about disclosing how the company will realize its goals.

"We like to be open about where the growth will come from," McLain explains. "Any product category that's in or around the bin isn't out of the question, as is anything that helps make the work environment safer and



3D Level Scanner.

compliant with government regulations."

Lately, McLain says, the company has been working closely with the University of Nebraska and tapping into some of the pioneering ideas and talent that is available locally. "There are some great ideas, and there's state and federal grant money available to help us explore them," he says.

At the end of the day, success isn't just about great products, profits, or growth, according to McLain. "Being a good corporate citizen is also important to us. We do things like highway trash pickup for a mile-long stretch of road, have an extensive recycling program, and give to

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our local community supporting United Way and the local food bank," he notes.

When quality is a core value, happy customers and profitability go hand-in-hand, McLain concludes.

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