Although Kim Massana was an outsider to Innovative Interfaces (originally Innovative Interfaces, Inc., aka III) when he started as CEO in August 2012, he was no stranger to libraries or enterprise systems. Before coming to Innovative, Massana never directly worked with integrated library systems—III’s bread and butter—but his stint as president of Elite (a Thomson Reuters company) honed his skill with enterprise resource planning (ERP). And in a prior role at Thomson Reuters, he worked closely with Westlaw in Europe, which serves both academic and law libraries.

“So when I came to Innovative I thought it was a nice combination of my days with libraries and also the software background I had at Elite, because in a way, the library systems that we’re working with here are like ERP for libraries,” says Massana. “I’m really enjoying the space, and I have to say that the clients, our partners, the whole ecosystem, everyone has been very open and forthcoming, so I’m really glad I joined.”

Massana comes in at the end of an era for Innovative. The company, which was founded in 1978 by Jerry Kline, Steve Silberstein, and Lachmann Sippy, grew from a small operation in Kline’s spare bedroom to a mainstay in the library automation industry for its library integration services. After buying out his co-founders, Kline maintained sole control of the company until 2012, when private equity firms Huntsman Gay Global Capital (now HGGC) and JMI Equity (now JMI) bought a substantial portion of Innovative, as well as SkyRiver Technology Solutions, another company owned by Kline.

Kline maintained a stake in both companies and served as chairman of the board of directors until he was bought out entirely by the two equity firms in January 2013. For the first time since it began, Innovative is moving forward without any of its original founders. And Massana is stepping in.

Massana makes no bones about who runs the show: “I report to a board, which has private equity [representatives] and an independent director ... and obviously we have board meetings and decisions,” says Massana. “But I am the CEO and I run the company from day to day and make the decisions and that’s what I like about these private equity groups: that the management team is the one running the company on a day-to-day basis.”

He says HGGC and JMI aren’t the type to shortchange a company by buying and selling quickly. The private equity companies aren’t there to make a quick buck, according to Massana, and they want “to grow the company and be here for the long term.”

In the 1980s, Innovative made its mark on libraries by launching one of the first commercial integrated library systems (ILSs). It followed this up with two popular programs in the 1990s: INN-Reach, which facilitated libraries in resource sharing, and Millennium, an updated ILS many libraries still use today.

In 2011, the company launched Sierra Services Platform, its most advanced ILS to date. Sierra’s features are designed to reflect its place in the modern library, letting its users deploy the system locally, by way of the cloud, or as a SaaS product. Although some libraries updated from Millennium to Sierra, the new system brought in plenty of first-time users; more than 450 library systems—comprising about 1,400 individual libraries—have adopted Sierra as of July 2013.

But it’s not just the rapid adoption rate of Sierra that interests Innovative’s CEO. “Our priority is to continue to define Sierra as the most successful ILS program in the market,” says Massana. “[And to] make sure we develop many more partnerships with our players, and on that front we expect our clients to help us define what partnerships they want in place, because at the end of the day, we’re in business for our clients.”

In addition, while Innovative continues to optimize Millennium and Sierra, it produces other tools designed to
coexist with ILS in libraries. For libraries that want to improve resource allocation and simplify collection management, Innovative offers Decision Center, a program that lets users access tools to make library workflow more effective. On the digital front, III offers Content Pro, a digital asset management system that makes archives, special collections, and other digital materials accessible to patrons via the internet. For in-house electronic holdings, Innovative’s Electronic Resource Management helps control a library’s e-resources.

But the biggest announcement, set for release in 2014, is Sierra 2.0, which Massana says the company plans to debut at the ALA Midwinter meeting in Philadelphia in January 2014.

On the Road
Massana isn’t just giving lip service to client connectivity—he’s often out on the front lines himself. Innovative has a presence in 52 countries, and Massana believes it’s important to make a play for the ones that aren’t close to their headquarters in Emeryville, Calif. “We are the No. 1 player in the U.S.,” says Massana. “And we’re the No. 1 player in some of these other markets, but we think we can become the No. 1 in a significant amount of these other countries.”

‘Our priority is to continue to define Sierra as the most successful ILS program in the market.’

To illustrate his commitment to Innovative’s international users, Massana has traveled a lot lately. In the past 6 months, the CEO has been to Hong Kong and London to address local Innovative Users Groups (IUGs), visited Dublin to help open Innovative’s new European facility and data center, and ventured to Noida, India, to attend the opening of Innovative’s new service and support center.

The international move is part of a concerted effort to change the underpinning philosophy of Innovative. “We want to go from a successful U.S. company that exports its products internationally to being a truly global company,” says Massana. The CEO adds that although Innovative is committed to the areas where it has traditionally been strong (North America, New Zealand, Europe, and the Middle East), he sees greater room for expansion in places such as Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Growing Pains
Every transition takes time, according to Massana. But his tenure hasn’t exactly been marked as a period of quiet settling in. The CEO acknowledged that a certain amount of finessing is required to make things run well when one is newly in charge of an established company. “You have to invest in [transitions], and you have to over-communicate, and you have to bring everybody along in that transition,” he says. And he’s made some moves that might not have flown with the previous owner.

When Innovative’s sister company, SkyRiver Technology Solutions, filed suit against OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) for alleged monopoly and anti-competitive business practices in 2010, it drew the company into what could have been an extended and expensive legal marathon. In March 2013, Innovative withdrew the lawsuit and absorbed SkyRiver into its own organization. At an IUG meeting in San Francisco in May, Massana spoke to users about the lawsuit withdrawal and absorption of SkyRiver, saying he didn’t believe the library community liked OCLC and Innovative settling their differences in court and that the company is committed to seeing SkyRiver continue to compete head-to-head with OCLC.

“We wanted SkyRiver to have the full support and resources of Innovative, and more importantly, the full sales channel. And also I think that clients were a little confused about why these were two different companies,” Massana says. “So to give … both more access and more reach and credibility, we decided to put [them] together.”

Inside the Box
In years past, III’s products have had a reputation for being a black box—a product that can be measured in terms of what can be put in and taken out of it, but not what’s going on inside. Famous-
ly, or for some users, infamously, the older ILS Millennium was considered to be a black box product.

“We want to change that perception radically with Sierra, and we want to make sure that our systems are open and can communicate with any other systems that the library would have, whether it is ERPs or CRMs [customer relationship management] or business intelligence, or any other system out there that we’d want to communicate and exchange information with,” says Massana, noting that Innovative has invested heavily in APIs, offered its new flagship program Sierra as an open SQL database, and opened itself up to the greater library ecosystem. As evidence that Innovative is more collaboration-oriented than before, Massana points out that Innovative now has expanded partnerships with EBSCO Information Services, OverDrive, 3M, and Bowker.

“I think this is a big change from the prior Innovative, which, again, was a very successful company, with many successful products like Millennium, but [it] was a little bit inward-looking and less open to what is going into the ecosystem,” he says.

III’s change from black box to open book is something Massana has strongly advocated in his first year, seeing the move as a way to be perceived more favorably by clients. Although this constitutes a serious shift in design and implementation philosophy, Massana isn’t worried about changing too much too fast. “[S]uccess brings success, and if you look back to the success we’re having with Sierra, it’s much easier to bring people along with you on a change when things are going well,” he says.

CEO Blog

It’s not just Innovative’s products that Massana wants to make more visible and available. In an effort to keep up with clients and make the head of the company more accessible, Massana has been blogging. Since June 2013 he has written several times a month on Innovative’s CEO INN-Sights blog, detailing trips, talking about new hires, and sharing his vision with clients who might be curious about the company that made their ILS.

“I was traveling a lot to see clients, and they were hungry for news about Innovative. I thought, ‘I really enjoy visiting clients, but we do have 1,500 of them,’” says Massana. He says he wanted clients to get his personal view, and a blog was the most technologically efficient method to deliver it.

“I’ve been surprised by how many comments I’ve gotten back from clients. ... So now I try to force myself to write a new blog [post] every week, every 10 days. The good news is that we have plenty of things going on, so there are always things to write about,” he says. But he’s just as vulnerable to the same blogging pitfalls that can snare us all: “I just have to have the discipline to write it on a regular basis,” says Massana.

Innovative’s Top Spots

Besides international expansions and hiring, Massana has brought on a host of new faces at the top level. He says it is part of his strategic philosophy. “I
think that the place where I can add more value at the company is making sure that I have the right team in place. ... I think that we’ve created a very strong team at Innovative.”

The CEO has brought together a handpicked, multicultural team to represent and develop the company, and he often details their hiring on his blog. Partly because of the influx of private equity funds, Innovative has brought on several new people: Doug Kaplan as VP of global alliances and partnerships, who has experience with Asian tech companies and markets; Hilary Newman for the newly created position of senior VP of library solutions, who earned an M.L.S. before coming up at Innovative; and Joe Murphy as director of library futures, who runs a popular blog and Twitter feed about library technology trends.

In a period of uncertainty about the future of libraries, Massana makes it clear that he wants Innovative and libraries around for the long haul. “Our philosophy is that we want to invest heavily in the library space. We think that the library space is very healthy, and we think that libraries with all the new technologies, especially in the transition from print to electronic, will need a technology partner and this is who we want to be,” says Massana. “So here at Innovative we want to be an intersection of library and technology and in that role we believe we are adding value to our clients.”