



# Mamas & Papas supports renewed growth with future-proof storage

Well-known retail group chooses OPEX route for HPE 3PAR refresh

## Objective

Refresh the storage environment to support growth and increase performance

## Approach

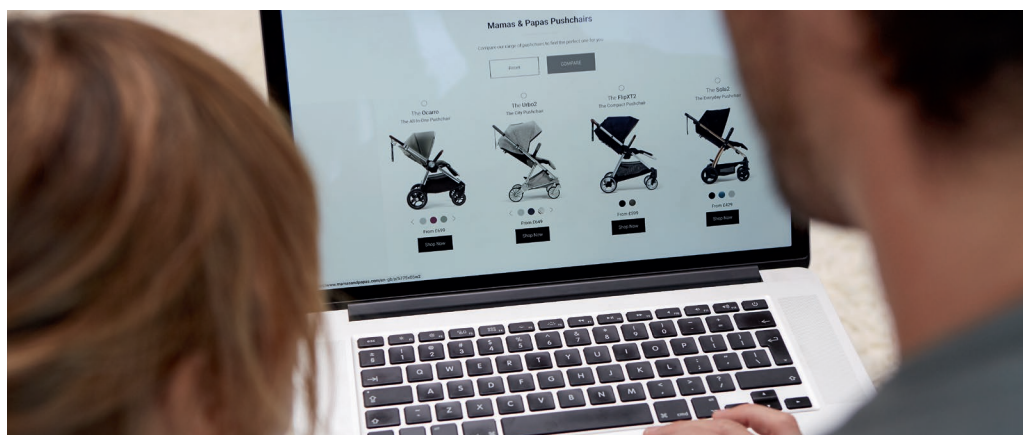
Researched the storage market and different finance options

## IT Matters

- Uses peer persistence for uninterrupted storage changes
- Increases performance with use of solid state technology
- Reduces management workload through user-friendly interface

## Business Matters

- Supports new period of business profitability, expansion and competitiveness
- Ensures high availability of business-critical data
- Uses pay-as-you-use model to spread cost and ensure regular equipment refresh



Following an enforced period of consolidation and cost-cutting, nursery group, Mamas & Papas has returned to profitability and growth. To support expansion, it needed to future-proof its storage environment while still controlling costs. The answer was a three-year quarterly payment plan on HPE 3PAR storage devices.

## Challenge

### Changing business demands

When Luisa Scacchetti was expecting her first child in 1979 she was disappointed by the uninspiring pushchairs available in her hometown of Huddersfield, UK, so she went back to her native Italy where she found the ideal pram. Louisa and husband David realised that they were not the only parents who wanted style as well as functionality and two years later they opened their first shop to import Italian goods. They called it Mamas & Papas.

The mix of Italian style and Yorkshire determination was a winning combination and the company, formed in 1981, grew into an international chain, designing, manufacturing and supplying clothing, pushchairs and nursery furniture. However, fierce competition from online players and supermarkets hit the maternity and children's market and in 2014, Mamas & Papas entered a period of cost-cutting and consolidation with a Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVA).

“Our new HPE 3PAR storage devices gave us different technology, including the use of solid state storage, and migrating the data brought instant benefits in terms of performance and IOPS.”

– Gareth Hutchins, IT Operations Manager, Mamas & Papas

The private equity firm BlueGem Capital Partners took a majority share.

Now, the firm is back on the up with a new 5,000 sq. ft flagship store in London, 31 High Street outlets in the UK and Ireland, 900 employees and a thriving online business which accounts for approximately one third of its income. It works with independent UK resellers such as Argos and Shop Direct and has many international franchisees including the giant Al Tayer Group in the Middle East and others in Russia, China and Japan. It also has an office in Hong Kong.

Behind the scenes, the difficulties at Mamas & Papas have had an inevitable effect on IT and particularly data storage. During the downturn, demand reduced but with a return to significant growth, there was a need to increase capacity and performance and to future-proof the environment. In parallel, cost vigilance has continued, and the new ownership has brought a change in procurement processes so obtaining best value is key.

## **Solution**

### **OPEX model selected**

Three years ago, Mamas & Papas installed two HPE 3PAR StoreServ Storage appliances at its Huddersfield headquarters. They were in two buildings 600m apart and connected by dark fibre with data replicated between them in an active/active configuration. Recently that lease came to an end and the situation was up for review.

“Our storage has to provide mirroring with the data replicated between the two sites,” says Mamas & Papas’ IT operations manager, Gareth Hutchins. “We’ve worked quite closely with Hewlett Packard Enterprise over the years and when the 3PARs first came out we were certainly keen on the high performance and on using the technology. Our core business systems are interconnected environments that host an in-house developed Progress application that runs on a HP-UX platform. In the past, this solution connected to an HPE EVA 6100 while the VMware® virtualisation workload ran on a separate storage platform. This meant that we were already familiar with the HPE technology and by choosing 3PAR we wanted to consolidate storage but make sure that both workloads would run on the same appliances without conflicts or major performance issues.”



HPE Financial Services offered a range of financing solutions and Gareth explains the evolution: “Previously there was a policy of buying and owning assets, not leasing. When we started our virtualisation path, a large investment was required as we were opposed to buying individual servers per project. IT worked with Finance and agreed the OPEX concept was the best approach for the business as it provided a steady expenditure over the period and would also enable Mamas & Papas to keep updated with the latest technologies. Three years can seem a long time, but in IT and it comes and goes extremely quickly and a three-year payment model works well for the business.”

When the initial three-year payment plan ended, Mamas & Papas only had a three-month window to research solutions, confirm specifications and order the kit. This equipment had to be installed in time for testing prior to the peak pre-Christmas period. The company’s IT technical manager, Bryan Bradwell, who is responsible for the daily aspects of the project, worked with its IT partner, OCSL, to review the situation. After considering another vendor solution, Mamas & Papas decided to continue along the pay-as-you-go path for its 3PAR refresh. The refresh involves two new HPE 3PAR StoreServ 8400 Storage appliances with data still mirrored between each site. The company also acquired four HPE ProLiant BL460c blade servers under a payment plan and they are used as VMware hosts. Its business-critical 3PARs are protected by HPE Proactive Care support and the blades are supported by HPE Foundation Care contracts.

“We class the HP-UX platform as our core business system,” says Bryan. “All business data resides on this platform and it also hosts our warehouse management system, customer service, call centre, ERP, CRM, and finance platforms. HP-UX connects directly to the HPE 3PARs, so all the in-house developed core business systems are stored there. Our e-commerce platform is treated independently and resides at a Rackspace location. This is managed by systems integration partner Eclipse and is running on a Hybris platform.

“We have HPE micro servers located at our stores which are running our in-house developed EPOS solution, this has an SQL back end and .NET front end. We keep those systems up-to-date by sending and receiving XML files from the core business platform over the MPLS network. The EPOS system is designed so that each store can run in isolation from the head office for a short period and any network outages don’t directly affect customers.”

The HPE 3PARs deliver 57TB capacity on solid state storage and 80TB on fibre channel. With the tight deadline and the need to cut over to the new equipment without loss of service, the implementation was conducted successfully by OCSL and HPE.

## Customer at a glance

### Hardware

- HPE 3PAR StoreServ 8400 Storage
- HPE ProLiant BL460c blade servers

### HPE Services

- HPE Financial Services

### HPE Pointnext Services

- HPE Proactive Care
- HPE Foundation Care
- HPE Installation services

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“A quarterly payment solution gives us steady expenditure over a period and enables us to keep updated with the latest technologies.”

– Gareth Hutchins, IT Operations Manager, Mamas & Papas

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## Benefit

### Performance and reliability

One of the main benefits for Mamas & Papas is peer persistence, the HPE 3PAR feature that enables your chosen flavour of hypervisor to act as a metro-cluster, enabling virtual machines to be migrated without interruption from one location to the next, with zero downtime. The company can now make storage adjustments with no worries and mirroring still ensures the high availability of critical data.

Having solid state drives on the new HPE 3PARs has also increased performance as Gareth explains: “There was an instant benefit in terms of performance and IOPS (input/output operations per second). Because the volume of data had expanded over the years, users had noticed that some applications were running slower with the old environment. Using solid state storage and migrating the data over brought an instant improvement. When we implemented the solution, we went straight into a busy period, so we have not yet evaluated the improvement, but we know it’s there because of positive end-user comments.”

IT workload has also been reduced by the HPE 3PAR ease of use. “In the past we may have had multiple views to check the same thing and then go into command line but the new HPE 3PAR interface is a lot cleaner and easier to use,” says Gareth.

Following the implementation project, the IT team are now looking forward to the release of a new algorithm that they hope will improve deduplication and compression ratios even further.

Concerning the financial aspect of the deal, Gareth notes that, although they have refreshed the equipment, the investment cost has actually gone down and he is complimentary about the helpful assistance and responsiveness of HPE Financial Services, particularly in the cover of any equipment support costs during the switchover period. He also appreciates the peace of mind provided by HPE Proactive Care on these business-critical systems, particularly the HPE alerts on potential problems.

“We’re a business that lives by our brands and the HPE brand is certainly held in high regard here,” concludes Gareth. “BlueGem private equity firm now have a major share of the business and when we do IT audits and explain our

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