

Globe and Mail Update

Desktops on the move

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- **The Good:** Easy installation; one-button changing from Mojopac to host and back again; it uses minimal system resources; using a highly customized version on the road is a wonderful experience; it's better than carrying around a virtual machine.
- **The Bad:** The software will not load webcam or capture drivers; some software will not work (such as PDF writers); it does not support multiple users, and the system must run on computers running with Administrator privileges.
- **The Verdict:** Mojopac will not change history; it is in fact meant for very specific uses, mostly corporate, and even then only those that have not been locked down by their IT departments

It must be either a craving for convenience or a paranoid wish for privacy that has driven the development of a growing number of devices that can carry your entire computer desktop, or parts of it, in your pocket or on a keychain.

A while ago Globetechnology.com [reviewed some so-called U3 devices](#), thumb drives that run tiny versions of applications and can be plugged into any computer. As USB drives have become larger and run faster, these devices have evolved into sophisticated gadgets. Two of the following three carry your entire personal desktop and applications in your pocket, and one is designed to carry your files around on a keychain.

Mojopac

[RingCube Technologies, Inc.](#)

\$49.99 (U.S.)



[Enlarge Image](#)

Mojopac will not change history; it is in fact meant for very specific uses, mostly corporate, and even then only those that have not been locked down by their IT departments. (*RingCube Technologies Inc.*)



Mojopac is designed for Windows XP users who want to create a separate desktop to carry around from computer to computer, as long as both computers are running Windows XP. It can run any application, but if you want to install proprietary software on it, you will run into licensing issues.

Mojopac can run on a U3 USB thumb drive as small as 256 megabytes, but users will want something bigger than that. The best medium is a pocket-sized USB 2.0 disc drive, 20 gigabytes or bigger. Mojopac's makers like to show Mojopac running on an iPod.

Mojopac's secret sauce is the relationship it has with the operating system: On setup, it will ask which settings and data folders should be copied from the owner's host PC to the Mojopac, including browser favourites, home page and browsing history. When plugged into another host PC, it sits on top of the operating system, but cannot write to that PC's main drive. The only way files can be transferred is from the host to the Mojopac, but only in host mode.

Speaking of modes, it's possible to switch between Mojopac and the desktop operating system via a button that appears on a toolbar at the top of the screen (it disappears when the Mojopac drive is removed).

Mojopac's makers like to say that "What happens in Mojopac stays on Mojopac," a nice turn on a trite phrase, but particularly apt; essentially, it launches a protected, virtual PC session that uses the host PC's hardware, but not its software.

Mojopac will, however, be able to access external USB memory devices and the DVD/CD player installed on the host, even DVDs and CDs emulated by a virtual CD-DVD drive such as Daemon Tools. It will also recognize printers, extra monitors, tablets, joysticks, audio devices, USB sound cards and microphones.

Mojopac comes with Adobe Reader, the Firefox browser, Skype IP telephone software, and Yahoo Messenger. Oddly, it doesn't come with Flash player, which is needed to run files from Mojopac's website.

- **The Good:** A complete operating system in your pocket, and one that is as secure as you can get; it's relatively inexpensive; it's a great way to learn Linux without having to re-dedicate your computer to it; it runs off a cheaper thumb drive.
- **The Bad:** You might have to teach yourself to use Linux; it requires a computer equipped to boot from a USB port; you might have to reconfigure a guest host computer to boot from a USB device, which is not always possible; you might soon run out of space on the thumb drive.
- **The Verdict:** A slightly more expensive but less limited way of creating a portable desktop

A slightly more expensive but less limited way of creating a portable desktop is by going with Mandriva, a version of Linux, installed on a 4GB flash drive made by Dane-Elec called the Zmate Pen. This is a full-featured operating system that fits into 1 GB of space, leaving the remaining 3GB in the thumb drive for extra applications or files.

Running with Linux is both the upside and downside here. Linux does not integrate nicely with many Windows corporate networks; it requires a bit of Linux savvy to get it to converse amicably with its worst enemy. It's also a whole new system to learn for those unfamiliar with it — however, this is also a great way to learn Linux without having to go through the business of installing it on your production machine.

Mandriva Flash
[Mandriva Linux](#)
\$99 (U.S.)

Mandriva has included a large database of drivers to make the flash drive work on as many machines as possible, and a new networking tool called Drakconnect that can understand several different ways to connect to the Internet.

Just saying the word Drakconnect gives one a primary experience of Linux and its remarkably ugly names, which only a Penguinista could love. The ugliness, however, is counterbalanced by the inclusion of the Linux mobile 3D desktop, the kind of eye candy programmers hate but users love.



[Enlarge Image](#)

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Mandriva — once called Mandrake until lawyers from the Hearst Corporation waving writs forced the name change — is not the hottest version of Linux in America (leave that to SUSE and Ubuntu), but it has been sailing quite well in Europe, especially France, where Mandriva is based. In other words, it's a respectable product and a good initiation into the wonders of Linux.

Another downside is that one must get into the BIOS of the host computer to make sure it will boot from a USB device. The experience might prove a little vertiginous to novices, and will probably make technologically un-hip owners of guest-host systems downright grumpy. Moreover, it will not run on a machine that already has a boot loader installed. The current copy was first tested on a dual-boot Windows XP/Vista machine, and Mandriva Flash couldn't even get its little open-source foot in the door.

- **The Good:** It can catalogue and index removable media such as CD/DVD discs, external hard drives, and even flash-memory devices
- **The Bad:** Its interface is more simplistic than simple; certain file types require separate plug-ins, and it doesn't index the text in e-mail or in the contacts folder
- **The Verdict:** The nice features of Filehawk are counterbalanced by some serious shortcomings

The popularity of desktop search tools says a lot about the long, sad history of Windows' failure to offer a decent indexing system on our inexorable march to file hell. Computers are turning us all into data pack rats; finding something on your hard disk now requires a, um, computer.

That explains the successes of Copernic, Google Desktop Search, Windows Desktop Search and Yahoo Desktop Search. A new player has arrived, Quadrom Services, based in Montreal and Barcelona. Its product, Filehawk, comes in four flavours —Enterprise, Pro, Basic and now U3; the U3 version makes file sorting portable, and Quadrom charges for it, which is odd when so many competitors give their products away for free.

Filehawk
[Quadrom Services, SL](#)
\$6.95 (U.S.)

Filehawk for U3 USB thumb drives stores and indexes thousands of files on a flash drive, allowing users to carry their files with them and find them quickly — which should save a lot of embarrassment in executive meetings, where rummaging about for a file is considered a faux pas of colossal proportions.

Filehawk offers three services: a fast search system, a file-synchronization utility that transfers and backs up files, and an organizer. Let it read all the files on your computer and you can find them quickly with previews based on criteria such as words or phrases. It also searches e-mail attachments in Outlook and Eudora, and it can be scheduled for updates and indexing.

Quadrom has, regrettably, fallen into the same trap as some other software makers who want to make their products appear irresistibly simple: It has made the interface look a like it's intended for a child.

At the heart of FileHawk is the iFilter technology used by Microsoft in Windows Desktop Search. Alone, it supports the most common file types, but not all: Forget indexing files

created by the open-source OpenOffice.org suite. Neither will it search browser favourites or browser history, nor your contact list or the text within e-mail messages.

You can buy or download for free support for the missing file types (including the ability to search inside PDF files) by installing the appropriate iFilter plug-ins, but this requires you to make a list of the file types you want included, and then find the plug-ins, which is a curious thing for a search tool.

The nice features of Filehawk are counterbalanced by some serious shortcomings, especially the inability to read e-mail; losing that ability would be a deal-breaker for some people.

