

Your USB drive is more than just a glorified floppy disk. Use it to the max!

Fantastic Flash

BY JOSHUA GOLDMAN



USB FLASH DRIVES have all but killed the floppy disk. To drive the nail further into floppies' 3.5-inch coffins, developers are making apps that launch directly from a flash drive for use on any computer. You don't need to install the programs on your PC, and they leave no remnants when you remove the drive.

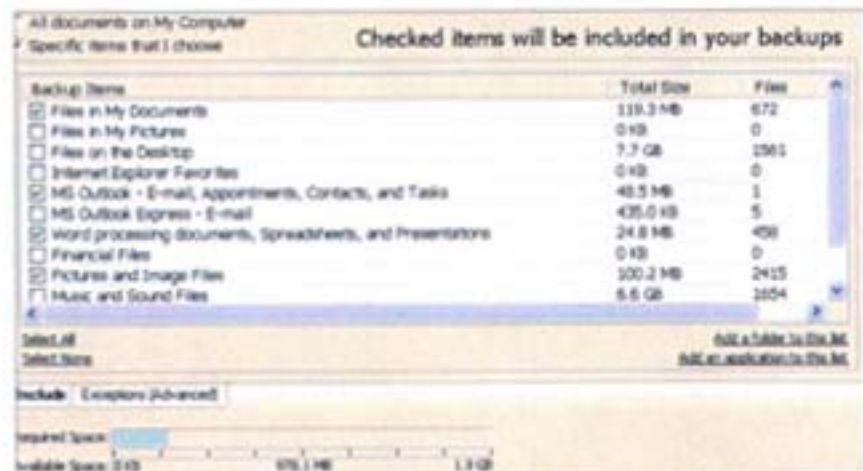
Omega, for instance, has corralled a number of self-launching apps for download from its site for use on its Active Disk-powered drives. And by year's end, SanDisk, Kingston, and others will introduce drives that support the U3 (www.u3.com) standard, which enables a multitude of portable apps.

Don't want to wait that long? Plenty of programs now work with any flash drive. Here's how to start using three of our favorites.

1 Securely back up files

USB flash drives are great for backup copies, but no need to stop there—you can turn your drive into a complete backup solution using Tanagra Memeo (\$24.95, www.tanagra.com).

To begin, download Memeo from its Web site (a 30-day trial is available) and run the installer. Once it's finished, a wizard opens to set up your initial backup. Choose Removable Storage Drive from the top drop-down menu, and Memeo will scan your PC for connected USB drives. We used the \$219.99 Memorex M-Flyer USB 2.0 TravelDrive for its styling,



Memeo lets you choose the files you'd like to back up, plus tracks how much you've stored and the drive space left.

speed, and roomy 2GB storage capacity. Select your drive from the next drop-down menu, then decide whether you want Memeo to encrypt your files. The M-Flyer comes with software to password-protect a partition on the drive, so we opted to keep files accessible.

Next, choose the folders and files you'd like backed up. Memeo quickly determines the total size of commonly backed-up file types, including the Personal Folder (PST) file Outlook creates for e-mails, appointments, contacts, and tasks. This file is accessible to only one app at a time, however, so if you want to save it, you need to completely shut down Outlook for Memeo to retrieve it. As you add data to your backup, a meter at the bottom of the interface keeps track of how many megabytes you're storing and the amount of storage space left on your drive.

Once you've chosen your files, click Next, then Done, and Memeo starts the initial backup. After it's finished, the app will automatically track any changes to files you've backed up and update them as long as the drive's attached. If you remove the device, Memeo saves a list of all the files that have changed and backs them up the next time you plug in the drive. The software also allows for multiplexing, which lets you create multiple backup jobs for different destinations. You can save personal files to your USB key, for instance, while directing work files to a server.

2 Take your e-mail everywhere

If you just can't stand to distance yourself from your Outlook e-mail messages, ImagineLAN's \$30 P.I. Protector (PIP) Mobility Suite 4.0 (www.imaginelan.com) lets you check your messages from any computer, public or private. It also includes trace-free Internet Explorer Web surfing

and two-way file synchronization. The app restricts itself to your flash drive, but the computer you're using must have Outlook or Outlook Express for you to access your messages.

For this job, we used the most pocket-friendly drive we could find—the light, compact 512MB Crucial Gizmo (\$42.99, www.crucial.com). PIP installs and runs from your flash drive, so you'll have to connect it to your system before you begin. The \$30 suite is available directly from the developer's Web site. (No trial version is available.) Start the download, and save the file to your desktop or other location where it'll be easy to find.

Once the download is complete, double-click the file. It's a ZIP file, so Windows will ask where you'd like to extract its contents. Create a folder on your desktop, select it as the extraction destination, and click Unzip. An installation wizard should automatically launch. If it doesn't, go to the folder you extracted to, find the install file (its icon says Install), and double-click it. A wizard will walk you through the setup.

Again, you need to install PIP directly onto the flash drive, so when you select the portable-storage-device path, be sure to pick your drive. Click Finish to start the program for the first time. On PIP's main interface, click Settings, then select the E-mail Settings tab. Here you can choose whether to use Outlook or Outlook Express. (Outlook is the default.) Make your selection, hit Apply, click Modify E-mail Settings, and hit the Copy to Portable Device button on the next screen. Finally, select the folders you'd



P.I. Protector ports your Outlook contacts, e-mail, and appointments to a flash drive for anywhere access.

like to store on the drive, and click Proceed. When it finishes, you're ready to read, send, and receive e-mail on any PC with Outlook or Outlook Express installed on it.

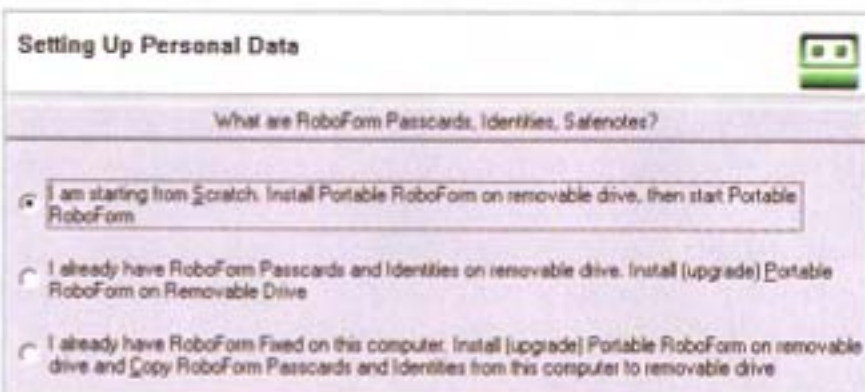
A word about Outlook Exchange Server accounts: PIP will save e-mail from a server in a temporary PST file. If you're away from the server, you'll be able to read e-mail, but not send and receive it.

Non-Outlook users with POP or IMAP e-mail accounts should check out the free portable version of Mozilla's Thunderbird e-mail app at portablethunderbird.mozdev.org. Just download it to your flash drive, then launch it. A wizard guides you through the setup process.

3 Organize your passwords

The most powerful password-management software we've come across is the \$39.99 RoboForm Portable (www.roboform.net). Also known as Pass2Go, the app is available as a full-featured 30-day trial.

Select USB: Portable RF to go to the download page, and double-click the installer. Attach and select the flash drive you'll be using to store your information, then pick a master password. Use something you can remember, but make



Once you attach and select your USB flash drive RoboForm will ask how you'd like to proceed with the installation.

it complex, with a combination of letters—uppercase and lowercase—and numbers. Though everything is encrypted, this master password is the only barrier between your information and anyone who gains possession of the drive. For a little insurance, we used Dekart Private Disk (\$45, www.private-disk.net), a program that adds an extra layer of password-protected encryption to USB flash drives.

After installation, all that's left is to start plugging in your information. With your drive connected, launch Internet Explorer (plug-ins are available for Netscape and Mozilla Firefox, too), and the Pass2Go toolbar will appear. If it doesn't, go to View > Toolbars, and select RoboForm Toolbar. Either manually input your logon information into Pass2Go, or just visit a site. When you log on to a site, the app will ask if you want to store the information. The next time you visit the site, select it from the toolbar's drop-down menu—RoboForm takes over, going to the site and logging on.

Tired of filling out Web forms? Pass2Go does that, too, as well as saving your browser's Favorites list. If that's not enough, it's got a powerful built-in Web-search bar. When you're ready to go, just eject the flash drive—no trace of your personal information is left behind.



Once installed, RoboForm automatically logs you in to your favorite online sites.