

Product Reviews

Multimedia software

Carry it Easy +Plus [PC Pro]

COMPANY: Carry it Easy

PRICE: £17 (£20 inc VAT)

RATING: ★★★★★

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Verdict: With such a vast range of portable applications, which ones should you install? And are any worth paying for?



Before even deciding what software to install, you need to solve the age-old IT dilemma of which standard to go for: the widely supported U3 or Lexar's proprietary PowerToGo?

First impressions of PowerToGo were good; unlike U3, it doesn't need to create a virtual CD drive to auto-load the applications and settings dock. Both the U3 Launchpad and the PowerToGo dock intuitively ape the Windows Start menu, with applications listed on the left, and settings and links on the right. We prefer the U3 software marketplace to that of PowerToGo's, because it tells you upfront whether an application is free or a trial, although both cry out for a decent search facility. U3 also offers whole-drive password protection as part of the standard, while PowerToGo can't lock an entire drive. But the major omission with PowerToGo is synchronisation software, which is the killer feature of a U3 flash drive. Dilemma solved: choose U3.

U3 software

There are some obvious choices for your U3 flash drive, most of which are free. We immediately installed the Firefox web browser (at present, only up to version 1.5), the Thunderbird email client, WinRAR, the Foxit Reader PDF viewer and OpenOffice (version 2). But you'll have to pay for synchronisation software - the key selling point of U3. The choice is between three applications.

The first is Migo Personal Edition for U3 smart drives. Considering it costs much the same as the others here, the interface is much less refined, looking dated and slightly clunky. There are useful synchronisation options to be found, though, such as the ability to filter by file type. If you only want your Word and PowerPoint files with you, just select the Office Files option.

It also lets you select which areas of Outlook or Outlook Express you want to synchronise, so you can just carry your Inbox and Contacts and Calendar. You can also filter the data synchronisation by date, getting only last week's email data, for example. Migo is more than fine for out-and-out data synchronisation thanks to the date and file-type filters, but the other tools here have better interfaces and offer extra features.

DmailerSync Plus U3 Edition offers file-type filtering when synchronising, but lacks the date filter of Migo. So, while you'll only be carrying around the files you want (Office files, for example), you'll have to synchronise entire Outlook folders. Due to your files being encrypted as soon they're synchronised, you have to use DmailerSync Plus to access everything too. The sleek interface therefore contains an email client, and the automatic encryption makes the password-protected logon quite powerful.

While the integrated email client is great in theory, it isn't as user-friendly as Thunderbird, and we felt constrained by the fact that we had to use DmailerSync Plus to browse even synchronised files on our drive. However, it does offer a secure browsing feature (it saves your internet history to the drive instead of the host PC) and you can have DmailerSync swap the host PC wallpaper for one you're carrying.

Carry it Easy +Plus makes data synchronisation so user-friendly it actually becomes a pleasure to use. Unlike DmailerSync, Carry it Easy +Plus can synchronise Outlook data by date, so you can specify only having recent emails on your drive. We could then take this data and move it into Thunderbird, which can also pull in email from online accounts. If you use Outlook Express at home, save £4 and get the plain Carry it Easy (not the +Plus edition). However, there's no file-type filter, so we had to save documents for travel to a specific folder at home and have Carry it Easy +Plus synchronise with this.

We found the automatic compression of synchronised files option useful, and the added extras in Carry it Easy +Plus are slightly better than DmailerSync's. The file-encryption tool can encrypt all the data in the default synchronised folder and even hides the files (although not the folders) from Windows Explorer. That's probably enough to confuse a data thief, although, as with Dmailer's encrypted files, the files can still be deleted. It's a close call, but **Carry it Easy +Plus comes out in front as our favoured synchronisation software.**

By Clive Webster