

# U3

A platform for portable Windows applications on USB flash drives from U3 LLC ([www.u3.com](http://www.u3.com)). Known as "smart drive computing," U3 introduces a computing paradigm with a new concept: the applications are portable, rather than the computer.

Both the U3-enabled application and the user's data reside on a U3 flash drive, and most drives are U3 compliant. The application can be run on any Windows 2000, XP or Vista computer without permanently storing any data or changing any settings on the computer.

Founded in 2004 by M-Systems and SanDisk, U3 sells software licenses to USB drive manufacturers and works with the fabricators that make the controller chips. The name U3 was coined from the marketing concept of "You: Simplified, Smarter, Mobile."

## Launch and Run Without a Trace

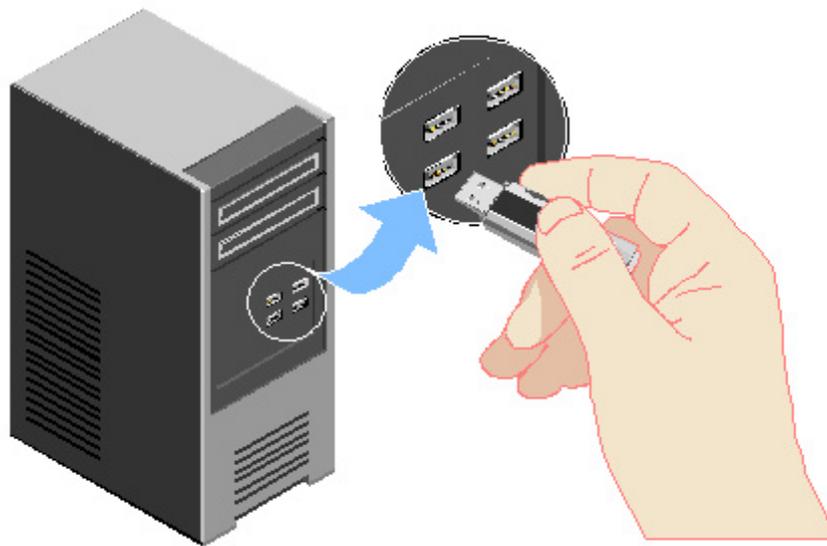
The U3 application can be set to launch immediately. Like software on a hard disk, the U3 application is read into memory and executed. However, when the smart drive is removed, there are no data or altered Registry settings remaining on the computer. The computer is used only as a processing engine, which means any computer can be used.

### The User Interface

Launchpad is the name of the user interface to the drive's contents and the user's personal workspace. Launchpad is currently a requirement, but it is expected that third-party applications will be created without using the Launchpad in the future.

### Developing the U3 Application

Applications must be modified to become U3 compliant. Applications that do not use the Registry need only be wrapped in an XML-based U3 header, and simple applications can be changed to avoid the use of the Registry. However, programs that rely on the Registry and/or COM software components (see [COM](#)) must communicate with U3 functions in the drive via the U3 Device programming interface (API). Programmers use the U3 software development kit (SDK) to make their programs U3 compliant. See [USB drive](#).



### The Future?

Some day, it is entirely possible that we will carry all of our applications on a keychain, and which computer we use will have little importance... somewhat like the old days of floppies (remember them?). In addition to flash drives, in the future, portable hard disks may also be used for this purpose.

- [Find the latest news, features and reviews relating to "U3" from CMP's TechSearch.](#)

↕ [more Answers below...](#)

Usb Sticks

Usb stick met uw logo/boodschap Scherpe prijzen, snelle levering!

[www.smart-promotions.nl](http://www.smart-promotions.nl)

USB Flash Memory Pen

Integrated with laser pointer/ LED/ card reader/ mp3 player tech

[www.usbflashpen.com](http://www.usbflashpen.com)

[Wikipedia](#)



[Directory](#) > [Reference](#) > [Wikipedia](#)

U3

*"U3" redirects here. For the airline using U3 as its IATA designator, see [Avies](#).*

**U3 LLC.**



**Type** [Private](#)

**Founded** [2004](#)

**Headquarters** [Redwood City, CA](#)

**Industry** [Computer](#)

**Slogan** Your digital universe in your pocket.

**Website** [www.u3.com](http://www.u3.com)

**U3 LLC.** is a joint venture that is backed by [Sandisk](#) and M-Systems. U3 is responsible for the development of a proprietary application design specification created for [Microsoft Windows](#) operating systems so that [applications](#) can be executed directly from a specially formatted [USB flash drive](#). Applications are allowed to write [files](#) or [registry](#) information to the host computer, but this information must be removed when the flash drive is ejected.

USB flash drives adhering to the U3 specification are termed "U3 smart drives" by U3.com. "U3 smart drives" differ from traditional USB flash drives because they come preinstalled with the U3 Launchpad, which emulates the Windows OS start menu, and controls program installation.

## The U3 platform

### U3 Launchpad



U3 Launch Pad, From a Geek Squad Flash Drive

The U3 Launchpad is a program manager that is preinstalled on every U3 smart drive, and is set to autoplay on insertion. [1] Since the autoplay feature doesn't work on [USB mass storage devices](#), a partition with the U3 Launchpad pretends to be a CD/DVD-ROM device.

The program is made to work with Windows 2000 Service Pack 4 and above. No Launchpad program

exists for the [Mac OS](#) or [Linux](#) platforms. [\[2\]](#)

## U3 applications

To be fully U3 compliant, an application has to be programmed to clean up its own data from the local machine. It must also be packaged in U3's special program format. U3 applications will only run from a U3 device.

## APIs

The U3 [APIs](#) allows U3 Programs lower-level access to USB flash drive.

## Hardware

U3 smart drives are traditional USB flash drives with a specific setup:

- Disk Management shows two drives, one drive has a CDFS partition with the autorun and LaunchPad, and the other drive has a FAT partition that includes a hidden SYSTEM folder with your installed applications.
- Optional: U3 Compliant Applications Preloaded

Hardware manufacturers can get the hardware development kit by emailing [licensing@u3.org](mailto:licensing@u3.org). [\[3\]](#)

## Compatibility

The U3 Launchpad and U3 Applications will only run on newer Microsoft Windows Operating Systems (Microsoft [Windows 2000](#) with [Service Pack 4](#) and [Windows XP](#)). Data will continue to be accessible from any OS capable of reading from USB Mass Storage Devices, unless the U3 device is password protected [\[4\]](#). "If the OS in question can normally see ordinary USB flash drives, then the U3 smart drive removable mass storage area (domain) should still be available for standard file system activities unless it is a private area protected by a password."

## Developer resources

Information on building U3 compliant applications, and the U3 [software development kit](#), are available to registered developers at the official U3 website. Individuals must register (as a company) to download the SDK, or participate in the forums. [\[5\]](#)

## Benefits

- Software can be taken with all its personalised settings to any computer running a compatible version of Microsoft Windows, with no need to install the software if not already there, or to use different settings and options, and no need for administrator access privileges.
- Software is available from the U3 site, including amongst others Trillian, OpenOffice.org, Filezilla (FTP app), Firefox (Internet Browser), Sudoku (Game), Skype (Phone calls from your computer).
- Programs are run from the Launchpad, functionally similar to the Windows Start menu familiar to most users of Windows XP.
- New software can be downloaded to a U3 flash drive without the requirement for administrative privileges on the host computer.
- Many U3 drives come with [virus protection software](#) which gives protection against being infected by or spreading [computer viruses](#).
- Some popular free portable application programs available at [PortableApps.com](#) for non-U3 flash

drives have been adapted for use with U3 drives. They are available at the web sites of U3 and PortableApps.com.

## Criticisms

Several criticisms have been made of the U3 platform. These criticisms are:

- **Closed Platform** - The U3 platform is closed and only open to vendors that U3 chooses to admit.
- **Lack of Reliability** - On some systems, U3 attempting to start up will cause the computer to freeze.
- **Stress on drives** - USB flash drive technology was not originally designed to handle the large number of write operations associated with running software
- **Not Uninstallable** - The U3 Launchpad cannot easily be uninstalled by an end-user. However, U3 has responded to this criticism as they have recently made available an uninstall feature on their website.<sup>[6]</sup> This is thanks to [Best Buy's Geek Squad](#) who in early 2006 raised the issue of not being able to uninstall with U3 and got them to write a uninstaller for first the Geek Squad branded drives and then all the U3 drives. Unfortunately, the uninstaller doesn't work in all cases. As of November 2006, U3 drives now come with an uninstaller on the USB drive itself.
- **Leaves Traces on Host PC** - The U3 platform sometimes leaves behind files on a user's PC. This mainly occurs when the drive is improperly removed.
- **Data Security** - Most U3 drives on the market feature a security lock within the U3 Launchpad. This loads the CD partition first and requires a password to be entered, otherwise the data partition will not load. The drive is supposed to seal itself after a certain number of invalid password entries, requiring a reformat.<sup>[7]</sup> Additionally, since the data partition is not encrypted, an end-user's data may not actually be secure as the U3 CD-ROM partition can be easily be used to store any program.<sup>[8]</sup>
- **Latest versions of Nero's InCD** tend to be incompatible with U3. Since u3 mimics a CD drive, InCD tries to operate on it and freezes the system. The only solution is to uninstall InCD or get an older version of InCD. InCD is used for adding drag and drop functionality to CD-RWs and DVD-RWs.<sup>1</sup>
- **Compatibility** - Some non-Windows users and users of older versions of Windows (pre-Windows 2000) experience problems using U3 drives, apparently because the emulation of a "vanilla" USB drive is imperfect.
- **Viruses** - Some users may be uncomfortable with the automatic installation of the Launchpad software that arrives on each U3 drive, since this would make a terrific virus vector.
- **Problems** - Where a user has insufficient privileges he may run into problems getting the launcher to work. In such a case the launcher might actually prove a hinderance to using the device

## See also

- [USB](#)
- [USB flash drive](#)
- [List of portable software](#)

## External links

### Official

- [U3 website](#)
- [U3 Knowledge Base](#)
- [U3 Software Central](#)

## Reviews and overviews

- [PC Magazine](#) reviews the U3 Launcher, and programs (has screenshots)
- [Freeware site applauds the simplification of "portable" application development](#)
- [U3 Newbie Guide](#)

## **Developer resources**

- [U3 SDK](#) (requires registration. individuals can register as companies)
- [U3 Platform Overview](#) (pdf)