

The Ultramobile PC

Will it Catch On?

A US company recently launched a practical alternative to the usual desktop or laptop computer. The OQO 02 is just 14cm wide, 8cm high, and 3cm thick. Yet despite its diminutive size, it's a fully Windows Vista-capable computer, with a 1.5-gigahertz processor, an 800-by-480-pixel touch screen, a slide-out keyboard, and three kinds of wireless connectivity.

The new breed of 'Ultramobile' PC was pioneered by San-Francisco based OQO; their 01 model was the 'world's smallest Windows PC' for 2 years. Surprisingly the target market – mobile professionals – have been slow to embrace the technology, although the 02 version features numerous upgrades includes better screen visibility and longer battery life.

OQO VP Bob Rosin said: "If you're a mobile professional, you need to be connected to the Web and access applications as part of your daily life--so your computer needs to be small enough and light enough that you're willing to take it with you when you leave your desk. Laptops don't meet that standard - if your computer weighs five pounds and requires a briefcase, that's very different from something you could throw in your jacket pocket."

Although miniature PCs are proving popular in Japan, Western consumers have yet to be convinced, with many criticising the slow performance, fiddly keyboards, and high price (compared to laptops). That said, manufacturers are addressing these issues head on. Screens and keyboards are notably easier to use, although given the compact nature of the device, there will always be limitations.

The OQO 02 is being aimed squarely at professional business users unlike many other handheld devices, such as Sony's Vaio UX Micro PC and Nokia's N800 Internet tablet, which are marketed as general entertainment devices enabling users to browse the Web and access videos, music, and photos.

