Lenovo’s ThinkBook Flip puts an extra-tall folding display on a laptop

Lenovo has another funky experiment it’s announcing at Mobile World Congress: the ThinkBook “codename Flip” AI PC Concept. It’s a productivity / business laptop with a flexible display, allowing it to be used as a traditional 13.1-inch clamshell, a folded-up 12.9-inch tablet, or a laptop with an extra-tall 18.1-inch vertical screen.

The ThinkBook Flip uses the same exact OLED panel as the $3,500 ThinkBook Plus Gen 6 that’s expected to arrive sometime in June — only here, it’s set up to fold behind the main portion of the screen instead of extend out from underneath it. That means there are no motors, which could bring costs down, and none of the display is left sitting unused inside the chassis — hence the Flip’s 0.4 inches of extra screen real estate over the Gen 6.

When folded back, the Flip can be used like a normal 13-inch clamshell laptop, albeit with nearly half its screen facing backward. You can use that rear-facing portion to mirror or extend your display and present to someone else without the need for an external monitor or projector, or just leave it blank. But the real star of the show is when you flip the screen up to get all 18.1 inches / 2000 x 2664 resolution of glorious OLED for yourself. In addition to being able to view long documents and websites, it puts the webcam and top portion of the screen at a pleasing and neck-relieving eye level.

Outside of its screen, the Flip’s other unique feature is its

Smart ForcePad trackpad. It offers three color-coded layers of LED-illuminated touch shortcuts and media controls you can call up within the pad itself. They can transform the trackpad into a number pad, offer shortcuts to functions like the Snipping Tool or a mute button for your mic, or serve as an app launcher. Samuel Shang, principal researcher of Lenovo Research, told me the company's dream setup would be to replace the touchpad with a smartphone display, but that would be too costly. The basic illuminated icons offered a fair compromise.

While the Flip is still in the concept phase, Lenovo does have some estimated specs for what would go inside, which seems like a promising sign this laptop will actually come to market. It'll use an Intel Ultra 7 processor, 32GB of LPDDR5X RAM, PCIe SSD storage, Thunderbolt 4 ports, and feature a fingerprint reader.

The ThinkBook Flip I got to see in a brief demo ahead of MWC was an early prototype that still felt fragile and a little rough around the edges. It was far from the ready-to-ship rollable ThinkBook Plus Gen 6 I saw at CES, which I didn't have to treat so delicately. But my colleague Allison Johnson saw another prototype of the Flip in Barcelona at MWC that already looked a little further along and less janky.

There's always a chance that this concept never goes beyond the prototype phase, but since it's borrowing components from the ThinkBook Plus Gen 6, the odds may be in its favor. The Flip may make sense as an alternate offering if its lack of motors means it can be offered at a lower price than its rollable cousin. I know I personally always want to see more funky laptops, and it'd be cool to get multiple flavors of these tall boys.

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