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Selecting disk drives

Our last article examined some of the considerations for your computer motherboard and CPU. We will devote this article to the selection of disk drives.

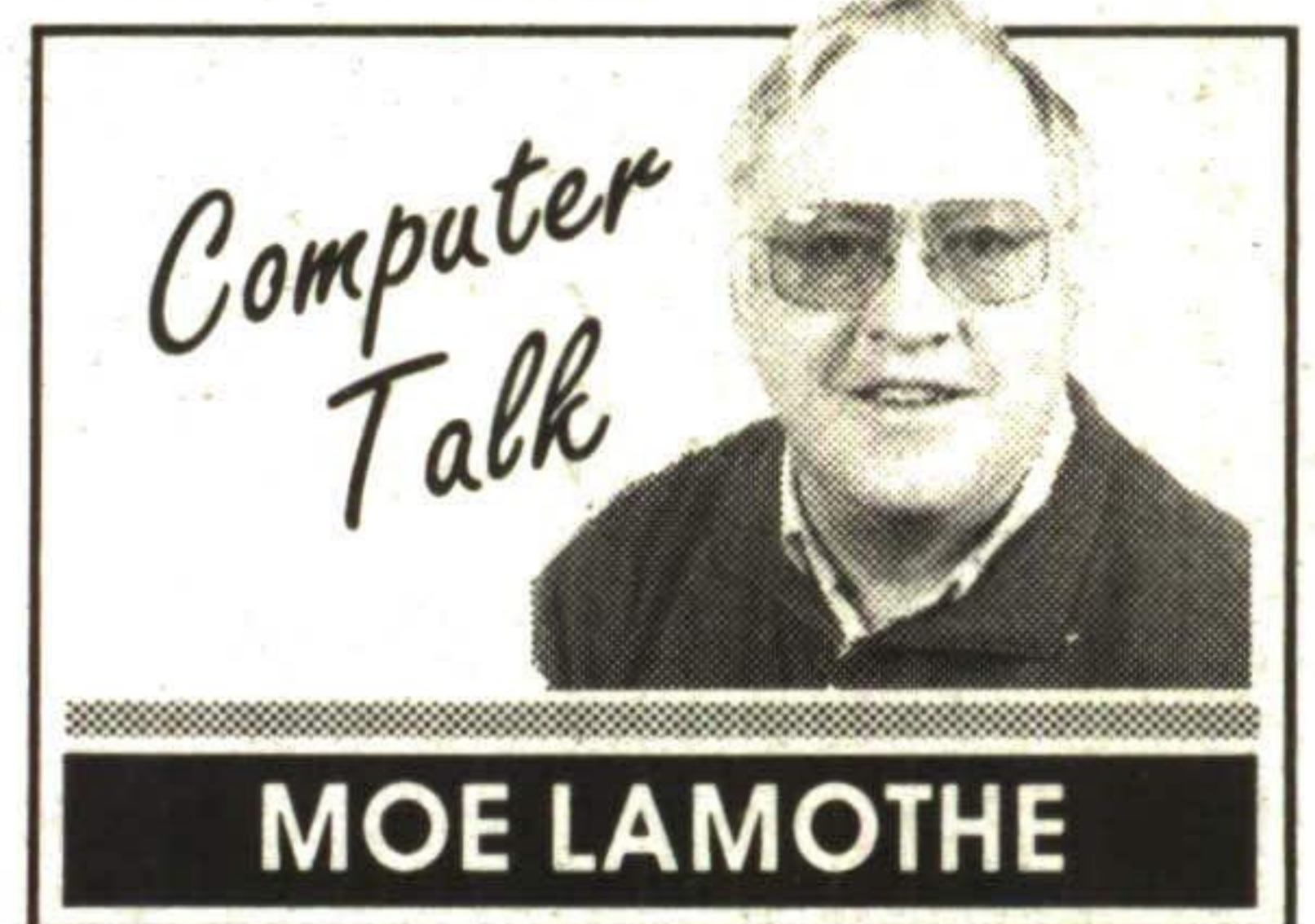
You will need at least one floppy and one hard disk drive but additional drives will be a definite benefit.

First, decide on your floppy disk drives since they are required to load your software into the computer. Today, most software comes on 3.5" floppies but there is still some software being distributed on 5.25" drives. You will definitely need a 3.5" floppy drive but you should have both a 3.5" and 5.25" drive for complete flexibility. For a 3.5" disk, the term 'floppy' refers to the recording media inside of the disk. This can be a bit confusing since the jacket is actually hard plastic.

Hard disks are used to store your programs and files. They are usually mounted internally in the computer case and they come in a large range of sizes and two basic interface types.

Speed on all of today's drives is about the same for our purposes. Keeping in mind that software, clip art and your files will take a large amount of storage space and that adding a larger disk later is not easy, buy the largest hard disk you can afford. The minimum size should be 230 Meg with 350 Meg or more being better.

Two types of drive interface are commonly available — IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics) and SCSI (Small Computer System Interface). For a high end system



MOE LAMOTHE

or a very large disk, you should consider a SCSI interface but most users will be better to choose an IDE type drive. The drive will need to have a Western Digital or compatible controller to take advantage of the 32-bit access available under the latest release of Windows. It should also have an on-board RAM cache, typically 64K to 256K or more.

Consider adding a tape back-up. Remember that your hardware can fail and it is very time consuming to recreate your files. An internal tape back-up can be purchased for under \$300. Externally mounted styles are also available.

A future article will examine CD-ROM drives. Our next article will cover monitors and video boards.

Moe Lamothe is president of M.A. Lamothe and Associates Inc. and is actively involved in consulting relating to computer hardware and software. He also conducts testing for CSA, UL and European Safety Approvals for computer and telephone equipment. Moe is president of the Halton Hills PC Users Group.

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