

## This Little Disk Was No Flop

*A Weekly Sunday Newsletter from Stilson Video Services*



*A 3.5-inch floppy disk next to its external drive*

---

Last week, I was tasked with copying a customer's family memories off a collection of about 50 40-year-old 3.5-inch floppy disks. It's not a common request, but I keep floppy disk drives around just in case.

I connected the drive to one of my vintage Macs and let it do its thing on the corner of my desk. Meanwhile, I attended to other tasks while occasionally stopping to feed it another disk.

At some point, I connected my portable SSD (Solid State Drive) to my current Mac and copied some data for another project. It happened to be sitting right next to my floppy drive, which was happily clicking and buzzing away.

The contrast between the two storage devices caught my attention. Looking at them side-by-side, I couldn't help but think about how far we've come in 40 years.

I know, I'm probably dipping my toe into the nerd waters on this one. But seriously, it is jaw-dropping to think about the progress of media storage in a relatively short amount of time.

## **First, a little history...**

It's 1981, and the 5.25-inch floppy disk, introduced in the mid-1970s, is the current standard for removable storage for computers like the Apple II, Commodore 64, and IBM PC.

***Side note:** My first flight simulator ran off a 5.25-inch floppy—and it was somehow really fun. Granted, you needed a good imagination to turn green, jagged lines on a black screen into something that resembled flight, but I managed. In fact, it started me on a path that eventually led to earning my pilot's license decades later.*

But the 5.25-inch floppy disk had some weaknesses. The disk itself was flexible and could be easily bent. Protection was only provided by a soft sleeve. It also had an exposed magnetic surface opening, allowing dirt and scratches to cause read/write errors. Because of this, those disks could be fairly unreliable.

That's why when Sony introduced the 3.5-inch floppy, it was a welcome upgrade. It used a hard plastic shell and a spring-loaded metal shutter to protect the disk surface. This made it much more resistant to physical damage. It was easier to carry and far more dependable.

That ruggedness mattered because floppies were handled constantly—passed around classrooms, offices, and households.

In 1984, Apple helped popularize this format by incorporating it into their line of computers. In 1987, IBM did the same, and 3.5-inch floppies became the undisputed standard for personal computing by the late 1980s.

The 3.5-inch floppy disk came in three main variants with different capacities:

- 720KB (double density)
- 1.44MB (high density — the iconic "HD" disk)
- 2.88MB (never became as universal as the 1.44MB version)

It remained popular for a very long time in terms of technology—roughly 15 years—until CDs, USB flash drives, and the rise of the internet began replacing it in the early 2000s.

## Speed and capacity vs. today's SSDs

So how much faster at transferring data is the modern portable SSD on my desk? Maybe 10x, 100x, even 1000x?

Well, I crunched the numbers and it turns out to be **tens of thousands of times faster**—depending on several variables. In some cases, today's drives are over 100,000 times faster!

When you consider capacity, it gets even crazier.

My portable SSD has a capacity of 4TB, pretty typical by today's standards. You would need about **2.78 million** 1.44MB HD floppy disks to store that much information. That would be about **150 miles** of floppy disks if you laid them out side-by-side.

Even so, these disks were a success and functioned well in their day. In fact, I transferred the contents of all of them for my customer without a single read error.

Even though a floppy disk doesn't even have the capacity to store one photo from your smartphone, its icon is still universally recognized today to mean **"Save."**



Well, time to put the disk drive back into storage—but I can't help but have a little more appreciation for it now. If you happen to find a stash of these little disks, there's a good chance you can still recover what's on them.

Special memories exist across a wide range of media... why not find out what's on yours?

---

**Lives are important.**

Our mission is to connect them to future generations the best way possible.

Finally, if you have a topic you'd like me to write about, let me know at [\*\*stilson@stilson.com\*\*](mailto:stilson@stilson.com) and I'll add it to the list.

— Bill Stilson  
Stilson Video Services

**216-595-5155**  
**[www.stilson.com](http://www.stilson.com)**

Was this email forwarded to you? [\*\*Click here to subscribe\*\*](#)



Stilson Video Services, LLC | 6240 SOM Center Road Suite 140 | Solon, OH 44139 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!