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Floppy Disk is Not Accessible, Not Formatted, or Not Recognized by Windows

Symptoms

When you access a floppy disk, you may receive one of the following error messages:

A:\ is not accessible.
The device is not ready.

-or-

Disk is not formatted
The disk in drive A is not formatted.
Do you want to format it now?

-or-

STOP: The disk media is not recognized, it may not be formatted.

The same disk may work correctly with MS-DOS or Windows 95, or after you re-format the disk with Windows 98, Windows Millennium Edition, Windows NT, Windows 2000, Windows XP, or Windows Server 2003.

Cause

This problem occurs on disks that do not contain a media descriptor byte in the BIOS parameter block (BPB) of the boot sector. Some older preformatted floppy disks do not contain a media descriptor byte. Older product disks may also not have the media descriptor byte.

The media descriptor indicates the type of medium currently in a drive. With MS-DOS and Windows 95, you do not have to set the media descriptor byte. Therefore this problem does not occur with these older operating systems.

The media descriptor byte is located in the BPB of the boot sector at offset 21 (15h) and in the first byte of each FAT on the disk.

Resolution

To resolve this problem, re-format the floppy disk with Windows 98, Windows Millennium Edition, Windows NT, Windows 2000, Windows XP, or Windows Server 2003.

Workaround

Warning: This workaround is for advanced users only. This workaround involves using a disk sector editor to modify the media descriptor byte on the floppy disk. Misuse of a disk sector editor may make all the data on the drive or volume permanently inaccessible. Disk sector editors function at a level "below" the file system, so the typical checks for maintaining disk consistency do not apply. This provides you direct access to every byte on the physical disk regardless of access credentials. Therefore, you can damage or permanently overwrite critical on-disk data structures. Use this workaround at your own risk.

To work around this problem, use a disk sector editor to change the BPB media descriptor byte to the appropriate value. For example, you can use the DiskProbe tool to do this on a Windows NT 4.0-based, Windows 2000-based, Windows XP-based, or Windows Server 2003-based computer. DiskProbe (Dskprobe.exe) is included with the Windows Support Tools for Windows XP Professional and Windows XP 64-Bit Edition, the Windows 2000 Support Tools, and Windows NT 4.0 Resource Kit Support Tools.

Was this information helpful? Yes No ✕

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