Boot Sector Virus

It makes no difference to a boot sector virus whether a floppy disk is Bootable (note: means that it has on it the necessary system info to start your computer) or not, contains only data files, or even has no files. To this type of virus, the boot sector is what's important. Here's how they work. At boot, if a virus infected floppy is in drive A:, the PC's BIOS reads the boot sector (or a virus written there) into memory first, even before loading the operating system or before loading the antivirus program.

At that point, a virus can spread from an infected floppy disk to the hard disk. The process is almost instantaneous: The virus program in the floppy's boot sector gets read, then it takes control of memory--and most boot-sector viruses infect the hard disk immediately. If the floppy is not bootable, the boot process may halt, usually with a Non-System Disk message, but the virus is in memory nevertheless and can spread, usually by copying to the hard disk's boot sector or to its MBR (master boot record).

By infecting those areas of the hard disk, this type of virus loads into memory every time you turn the PC on, even before the operating system loads. This gives the virus an opportunity to restart the cycle by copying to more floppy disks as they pass from user to user.

Revised 5/28/2009 JMM