PERSONAL COMPUTING

❱ **When did digital devices become available to consumers?** Digital devices were first available to consumers in the 1970s when handheld calculators and digital watches hit store shelves. The first personal computers made their debut in 1976, but sales got off to a slow start. Without compelling software applications, personal computers, such as the Apple II, seemed to offer little for their $2,400 price.

As the variety of software increased, however, consumer interest grew. In 1982, *TIME* magazine's Man of the Year award went to the computer, an indication that these digital machines had finally gained a measure of popular acceptance.

❱ **What is personal computing?** The model for the second phase of the digital revolution, **personal computing** is characterized by small, standalone computers powered by local software. **Local software** refers to any software that is installed on a computer's hard drive.

During this phase of the digital revolution, computers were not connected to networks, so they were essentially self-contained units that allowed users to interact only with installed software. On the business front, large computers continued to run payroll, inventory, and financial software. Some managers used personal computers and spreadsheet software to crunch numbers for business planning.

If you owned a computer back in the second phase of the digital revolution, it was probably a small standalone machine with a display device that looked like an old-fashioned television (Figure 1-5).

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Courtesy of Blake Patterson

FIGURE 1-5

The most popular uses for personal computers were word processing and gaming; sound systems and graphics capabilities were primitive. The Internet wasn't open to public use, so computing was not a social experience.

❱ **How long was the second phase of the digital revolution?** In 1982, computers had gained recognition in *TIME* magazine, but fewer than 10% of U.S. households had a computer. Working on a standalone computer wasn't for everyone.

People without an interest in typing up corporate reports or school papers, crunching numbers for accounting, or playing computer games weren't tempted to become active soldiers in the digital revolution. Social scientists even worried that people would become increasingly isolated as they focused on computer activities rather than social ones. Computer ownership increased at a gradual pace until the mid-1990s, and then it suddenly accelerated into the third phase of the digital revolution.

TRY IT!

During the second phase of the digital revolution, which one of the following was making news headlines?

○ A new band called The Beatles

○ The first space flights

○ President Bill Clinton

○ Apple II computers