

Everyone talks about ATS compatibility. We measured it.

Three commercial parsing engines, one CV, three different results — including our own errors, the assumptions we lost, and the limits of this measurement.

AS OF	ENGINES	CONFIGURATION	EDITION
AUGUST 2026	THREE, ANONYMISED	DEFAULT	VERSION 1.0

METHOD

What was measured — and what was not

SUBJECT	What was measured is the parser: the software that turns a PDF into data fields. Not the applicant tracking system around it, and not its selection logic.
ENGINES	Three commercial parsing engines, anonymised here as A, B and C. Between them they sit inside a large share of the systems used across the German-speaking market.
SETUP	Default configuration, no coordination with the vendors, one invented test persona per template. The raw responses of all three engines are frozen and archived.

FINDING 01

One document, one address, three results

In a narrow sidebar column, a long email address wraps onto two lines. In the PDF it is there in full and looks correct. In the data set that arrives at the company, it is not.

IN THE DOCUMENT aarav@patel-sustainability.de		
ENGINE	VALUE RECEIVED	TYPE OF ERROR
Engine A	aarav@patelsustainability.de	hyphen swallowed — looks valid
Engine B	aarav@patel	cut off at the line break
Engine C	no value	discarded as invalid

Phone numbers arrived correctly with all three engines — it hits the longest field in the narrowest container. The most expensive case is the first one: syntactically valid, factually undeliverable. A reply goes nowhere, and neither side ever finds out why.

None of the three engines comes off well here, and none of them is to blame — the break sits in the document. This is expressly not a rating of the vendors; one configuration and one snapshot are far too thin for that.

FINDING 02

A torn value costs more than its own field

On a second template, a LinkedIn URL wrapped in the same narrow column. What was lost was not only the URL field — one engine assembled the test persona's first name out of a fragment of that URL.

NAME DETECTED, WITH TORN URL

Lin Schneider-Weber

NAME DETECTED, WITH INTACT URL

Thomas Schneider-Weber

"Lin" comes from `linkedin.com/in/...` — an error in one field migrates into another, and the second one looks perfectly unremarkable afterwards.

COUNTER-CHECK

Two of our own assumptions the measurement threw out

01 "A break only hurts at the dot and at the hyphen, not at the @ sign"

RESULT Rebuilt, measured, got worse. One engine then returned no email field at all and additionally invented a website address out of the severed remainder.

CONSEQUENCE Contact values must not break — anywhere

02 "A misread first name and torn job titles are defects of our document"

RESULT Both occurred at first with one engine only; the second read both correctly. The third brought one of the findings back — the name mix-up appeared with two of three engines, the torn job titles with one.

CONSEQUENCE Without a counter-check, a single finding is not a defect

One engine proves nothing

That is why the setup looks like this — and why a badge that rests on a single tool says very little.

PRODUCT CONTEXT

How the product handles this — in continuous operation

- **The text stream follows reading order.** Between the start of the document and the detected name there are 9 positions, not 516 — with a pixel-identical printed page.
- **Contact values stay on one line** — and the check runs on every change: it blocks the release as soon as a value wraps.
- **Where a break stays for structural reasons, the warning sits in the tool** — before you pick the template, not after.

LIMITS

What this measurement does not show

Without this section, the report itself would be just a claim.

No section model for German	None of the three engines returns a section model for German-language CVs; those fields stayed empty across every German-language template we checked. So on the popular question “does the system recognise my heading as work experience?” nothing can be evidenced for the German-speaking market. For English-language documents the same engines did populate those fields.
The parser, not the selection	What was measured is the conversion of the document into data fields. What a company subsequently does with that data was not part of this.
One setup, one point in time	Vendors change their models. Everything described here is a snapshot from August 2026, with one test persona per template — the findings describe classes of error, not frequencies.
Two cases stay open	On the four templates with a narrow sidebar, 2 of 16 checked profiles keep a break in the email address: addresses of 39 characters and up. That is documented, not defined away — the single-column layout is there for it, offered before you choose.

CHECK IT YOURSELF

You can see this on your own PDF in two minutes

```
$ pdftotext -layout cv.pdf -
```

It works without tools too: open the PDF in a viewer, select everything, paste it into a plain text editor. What appears is roughly what a parser of the simplest kind sees — the order of the text stream.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Is the email address there in one piece, or split across two lines? | ☐ Is the profile URL complete? |
| ☐ Does the content come column by column, or does it jump back and forth? | ☐ Is the name at the very top, or does a fragment from the sidebar appear before it? |

This check only imitates the simplest class of parser; the engines measured here additionally run a layout analysis. And `-layout` reconstructs the layout, so it flatters the result. The class of error in this report still becomes visible.

Which engine is actually reading along?

Most applicant tracking systems buy their parser in: of nine systems checked in the German-speaking market, six use the same bought-in engine. And the built-in one is not necessarily the only one — two companies on the same HR system can read with different technology.

The full version

The engine map with all its sources, the origin of the much-quoted 75-per-cent figure, and the common questions about two-column layouts

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PUBLISHED BY JACVAULT · MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS AND EDITING: JACVAULT · AS OF AUGUST 2026 · VERSION 1.0