

A gang of A11ys

How to grow accessibility even
when there is no gardener.

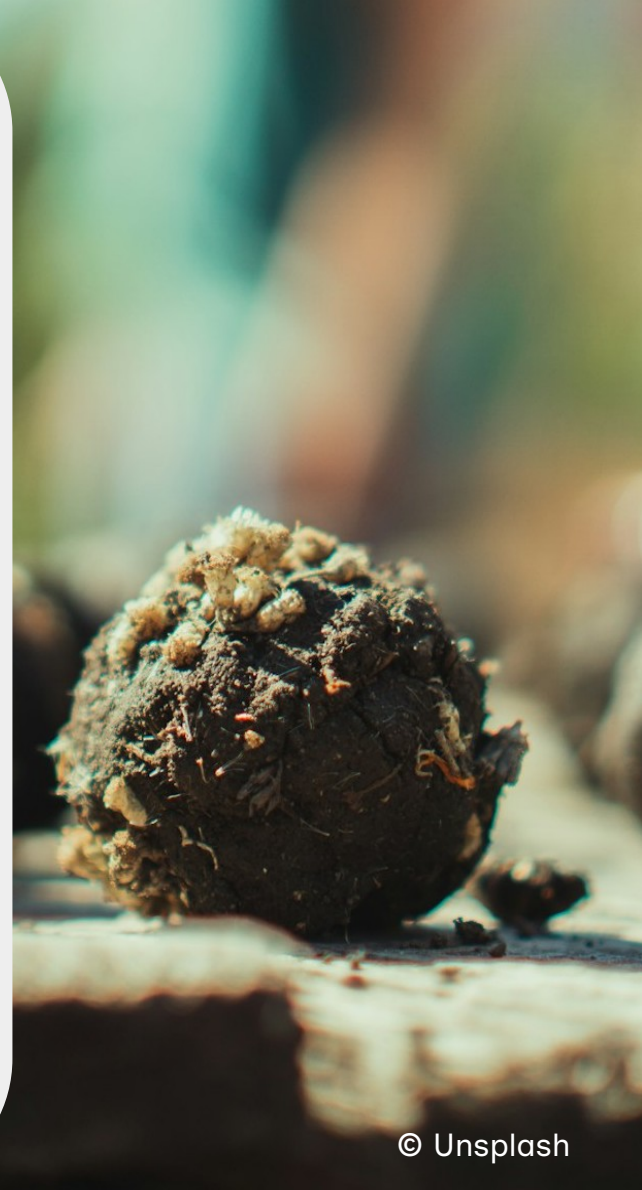
Leonie Theissen
Würzburg, 24.05.25



Rogue gardening

Seed balls (also known as “seed bombs”):

Clay balls containing seeds and nutrients



Rogue gardening



A sad story



A sad story all too common...

- Accessibility guild since 2016
- Self-learning, voluntary, across disciplines
- The EAA was coming!



A sad story all too common...

- Business case to the board (with ample time left)
- What happened: the economy
- No mandate, no resources



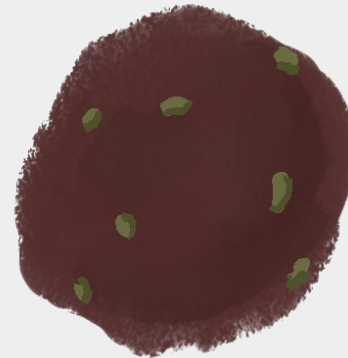


Become a multiplier



Going grassroots:

Accessibility seed balls



Ramp up the knowledge

- Share, learn, discuss
- build and curate a public knowledge hub
- Poke our people managers about training budget, workshops, webinars etc.



Talk, talk, talk



The art of not shutting up

- How much should you talk about it? - Yes.
- Address accessibility in meetings, ask questions such as:
 - Is this accessible?
 - How can we make this more accessible?
 - Can all people complete this task?
 - Will this be compliant with the EAA? Etc.



Introducing the topic wherever, whenever

Common buzzwords of a “learning mindset” and “collective growth”? Take their word for it:

- Tech lunch? We signed up.
- Strategy day? Booked a slot.
- Some “head of” needed inspiring content for their offsite? We were there.
- HR needs an idea for diversity day? We had some.



Nagging? Nah, marketing

- A person needs roughly **7 to 20** touchpoints with a brand/ product before they engage with it
- Repetition is key to learning and remembering
- For every person who heard it before, there are 2-3 people who hear it for the first time

Growing into “that accessibility person”

- Our faces became linked to the topic
- People knew who to approach for questions
- Our open chat channel became the unofficial accessibility helpdesk



Note:

- Don't enjoy public talking yourself?
- That's what allies are for...





Finding allies



Find a11ys

- The more the better. Network the hell out of your company/ peers.
- Maybe start with favourite colleagues
- Give a shout out on internal channels to look for likeminded people.
- Look out at your talks for interested people with questions



Why allies are important

- Distribute tasks among each other and carry less on your own
- Learn from each other, diversity of skills
- More people become multipliers → higher impact, even more awareness
- Back each other up in decision making processes and meetings (agreement pacts)



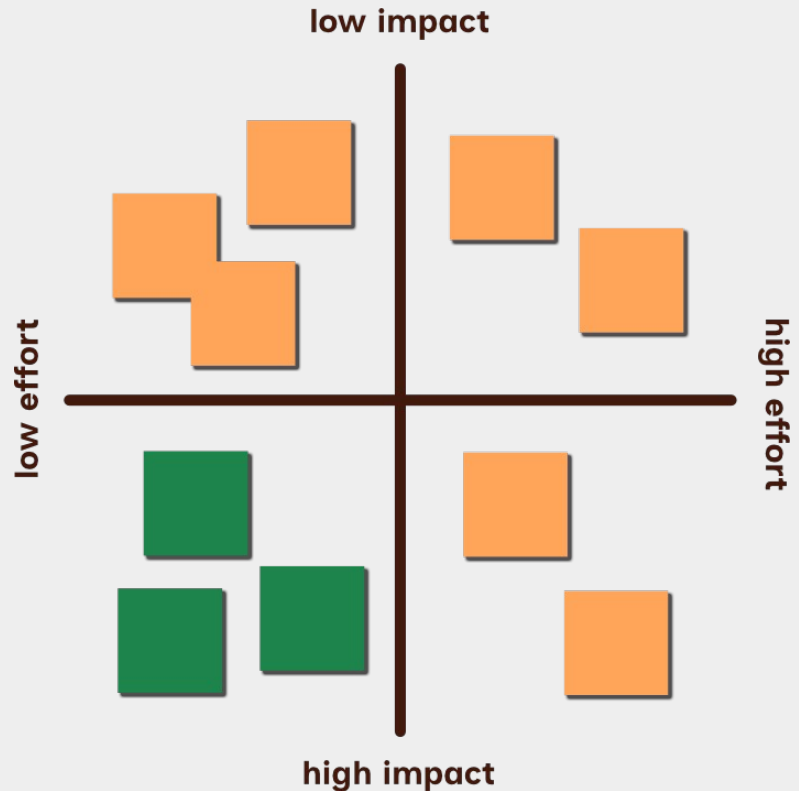
Go up the ranks

- the more high-ranking your allies, the more impactful
- “My door is always open” — Ok then!
- Elevator pitches for the busy
- Find the ones with intrinsic motivation
- Offer support for them to get started right away



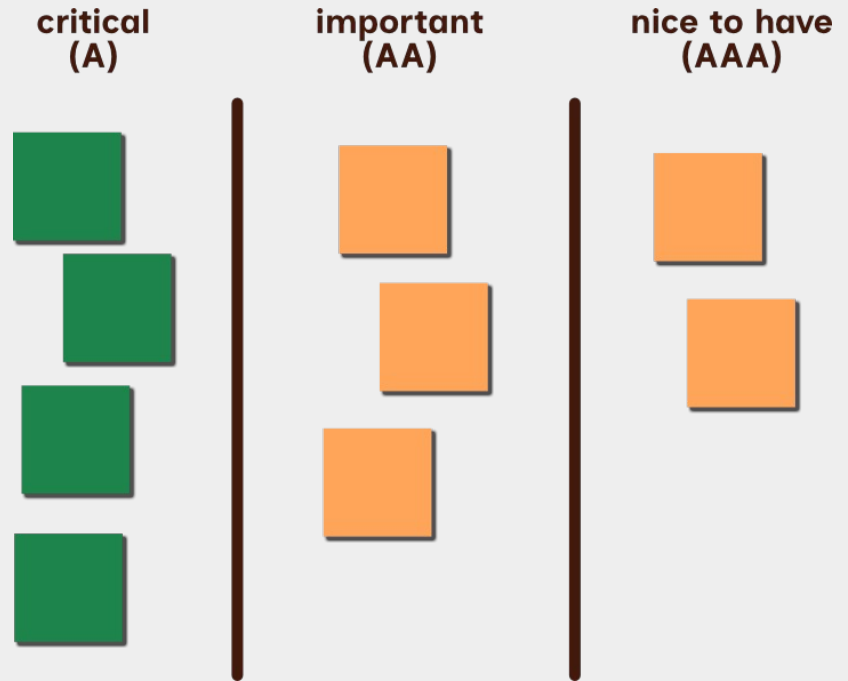
Help with the kickstart

- Identifying low hanging fruits to start with small initial successes
- Help prioritise the WCAG criteria mapped to the product (this might need external help)
- Let them know what is most urgent/ critical

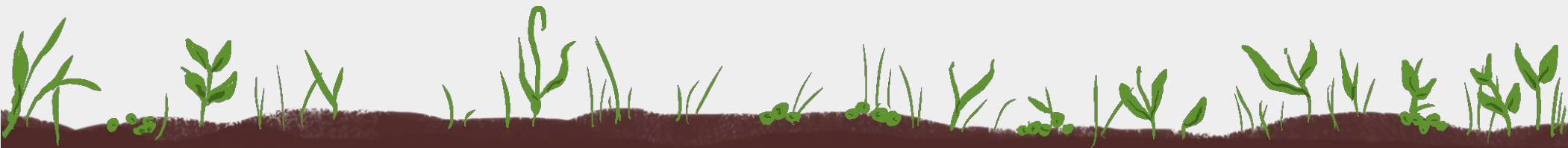


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Ways to make accessibility tangible

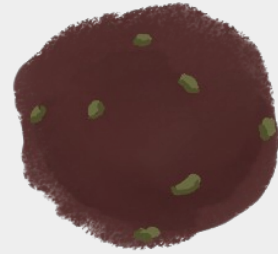


A face behind the issue

- Our most powerful tool: empathy with real people
- Humanise the topic to close the perception gap



Note:



- No (willing!) colleagues at hand?
 - Call for more diverse test cohorts in user tests
 - Show videos or reels of people with disabilities interacting with technology in a meeting (don't just send a link!)
 - Empathy exercises can at least cause a small perspective shift

**For each soil
a matching seed ball**
(target audience)



Targeting

- One baseline talk, versions adjusted to target audience
- Focus on what matters to their discipline and interests:
 - **Business potential, numbers and statistics, legal implications, conversion rates** (Upper management, Business analysts, Business developers, Marketing)
 - **Brand image, PR opportunities** (Marketing, PR, Content, Social Media)
 - **Usability and user journeys** (Product and UX)
 - **Technology and WCAG guidelines** (IT, Software engineers)
 - **Human stories and experiences** (everyone, hopefully)



Mental images and metaphors

- Spoon theory



Mental images and metaphors

- Spoon theory
- blue balloon challenge



Mental images and metaphors

- Spoon theory
- blue balloon challenge
- Visualising abstract numbers

7.9 mill.

x99

Offer different ways of engagement

- Immersive workshops like the “empathy circle training”
- Prize challenges
- Interactive screen reader demos
- Tell your own accessibility story (permanent, temporary, situative)



Note:



If you encounter people who would like to help:
have tips at the ready to tell them what they can
do TODAY to make a change

- Make a keyboard test
- Check designs for contrast
- Check product for colour traps
- Write alt texts



Whoa, that's a lot.



Why work on multiplication first?



- One flower might just crumble under the weight of the asphalt, even if it's strong and knowledgeable
- Creating momentum
- Accessibility takes various disciplines knowing what they are doing
- The danger of quick and dirty short cut solutions remains unless more people speak up



Want to connect?
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Let's be **many** first.

