When Alexis Moreno, PsyD, got her degree and launched a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm called Wit & Reason in 2017, she knew she needed a good website to set her business apart. Many psychologists’ websites looked exactly the same, she noticed—a light color palette and a photo of a lotus flower or succulent. “That didn’t reflect who I was—my personality,” says Moreno. “I wanted a place that was really welcoming, bright and fun.”

After working with a designer, Moreno launched a site (witandreason.com) that enables visitors to learn about her practice’s mission and services, and also to learn about psychology and mental health through articles, videos and even audio content. “My site is friendly and welcoming, without the stigma associated with mental health and psychotherapy,” she says. “It’s a one-stop shop to learn more about us and our industry.”

To make sure your website achieves your goals and best represents you:

1. **Consider hiring a website pro.** At first, Marc Martinez, PhD, went the do-it-yourself website route, but as his Penfield, New York, practice, grew, he turned to a local web designer to create a new site. “Because of my lack of technological sophistication, the first website just didn’t look very professional,” he says. Although Martinez already has a steady stream of referrals, the website helps him put his “best professional foot forward” as he seeks to expand his practice throughout New York. While Martinez heard of colleagues spending between $5,000 and $10,000 on their websites, he paid around $2,000 to $3,000, an investment in his marketing efforts he feels was well worth it. Although you can build your own site for free at sites like wix.com or squarespace.com, the average price...
for having a professional designer build a small business website is $3,000 to $6,000, according to website designer Mark Brinker, author of *The Modern Website Makeover*. Costs can be as high as $20,000, he says, if your site has lots of pages and needs lots of customization.

2. **Take into account your brand, your personality and the patients you want to serve.** Whether you’re going to design your site yourself or work with a designer, think about your brand and what makes your practice different. While the services your practice offers may be similar to those of your peers, says Moreno, “we each have our own unique style, orientation, personality and values that we bring into how we do our work.” Your website should reflect that, she says, adding that she showed her designer artwork she liked to help inspire her website design.

3. **Make sure your website reflects your practice.** Many of the patients Lisa Caren Litt, PhD, sees at her New York City private practice are women, many of whom have survived sexual assault and other trauma and who are addressing substance use concerns. To appeal to that clientele and reflect her own personal aesthetic, Litt created a website design (drlisalitt.com) featuring colors and images—such as photographs of orchids and other vibrant flowers—that project a soothing, feminine feeling. On Martinez’s site, images of legal tomes, scales and brain scans underscore his specialization in forensic psychology services.

4. **Keep your site uncluttered.** Make sure users don’t have to dig for the information they need, says Martinez. “I wanted my site to be simple, not flashy,” he says. “I wanted it to be easy to navigate so people wouldn’t be overwhelmed with information but could learn about me and my practice.” To do that, be sure to focus on the main reasons someone would be coming to your site, says Jaswant Pujari, co-founder and chief executive officer of Therasoft, which offers website design and support, practice-management software and other tools to mental health professionals. Engage potential clients with a message about how you can help them, then offer information about you, your services, your rates and what insurance you accept. Make your website functional, too, says Pujari. Visitors should be able to book appointments and make payments, for example. And make it easy to contact you. On Moreno’s site, for instance, there’s information about how to contact the practice and book a session on every page. “We don’t want visitors to struggle at all,” she says, adding that the site gives users the option to call, email or use an online form.

5. **Ensure your website is accessible to all users.** In October 2019, the Supreme Court decided not to hear a case about website accessibility and let stand a Ninth Circuit decision saying that websites must be accessible to the visually impaired under the Americans With Disabilities Act. While there are still no nationwide accessibility standards for websites, you and your website designer can work your way through the items in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (w3.org/WAI/).
6. Make sure people can find your website when they search for mental health services.

Use keywords on your site to enhance results via search engine optimization (SEO), or strategies that boost your website’s chances of coming up in Google and other search engine results. Think about what words or phrases the people who need your services might use to find you, suggests Entrepreneur magazine, then use a tool like Keyword Explorer (moz.com/explorer) to see how often people search for those terms and how much competition you’ll have if you use them. “Throughout my website, I included terms that I thought people would search for,” says Litt, citing as examples “trauma,” “PTSD,” “cognitive-behavioral therapy” and “substance use.” “I sprinkled those words around.” Be sure to use the words and phrases would-be patients or clients actually use, adds Moreno. “Mental health,” ‘wellness, ‘self-care’—those are big ones that the average person is looking for,” she says. “It’s not necessarily going to be psychology language.” Even photos and videos have tags that boost the site during searches, she adds.

7. Consider Google ads.

Google ads pop up on search result pages along with what Google calls “organic results,” the usual results where your website itself might show up. “Running some Google ads primes the pump and helps your website become visible more quickly,” says Pujari. “A lot of people say, ‘I’m not going to spend $500 in Google ads; I’m just going to create a nice website,’” he says. “But as soon as you spend that $500, Google pulls your website out and puts it right up front in search results.”

8. Be consistent across platforms.

Whether it’s her website, her business card or other marketing materials, Moreno reinforces her brand by using the same font, color scheme and other design elements. Every page on the Wit & Reason site also has links to the company’s Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and other accounts. Also add your website address to your email signature line.

9. Update your site regularly.

When Moreno first launched her website, she tried blogging as a way to boost SEO, but she quickly found it too time-consuming. Now, she and her colleagues link to TED Talks, news articles, their own radio shows—anything they think clients might find useful. Even small changes can help entice visitors to return to your site and boost your results on search engines. “If you have a static website that never changes, Google doesn’t come back to you,” says Pujari, explaining that Google and other search engines scour the internet to build a huge index of website content. If you haven’t used keywords and other strategies for making your site “crawler friendly,” warns Pujari, the crawlers will skip your site. Similarly, if your site never changes, the crawlers won’t come back. “If you have a blog on the site, if you’re adding articles and constantly changing things, Google keeps coming back there,” he says. Maintaining the site properly means you’ll have to call on your designer periodically or learn how to do updates yourself. “We definitely didn’t want a site designer who was going to launch something we couldn’t maintain,” says Moreno, who asked her designer to teach her to update the site.

“Your website is like a business card and brochure you don’t have to hand people; they’re coming and getting it on their own,” says Pujari. “If it grabs their attention and is relevant to what they’re looking for, they’ll stay.”

**RESOURCES**