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A photograph of Alicia Olson-Keating, a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue turtleneck and light-colored trousers. She is smiling and has her hand on her hip. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

People always matter...

Alicia Olson-Keating
President & CEO, Numeris and NLogic

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I am having many interesting conversations about People Panels. For those who know me, you know that I have a very strong and, I will state, “informed” opinion on this. In fact, several countries around the globe have measurement leaders who not only agree, but they will also fiercely debate with anyone who thinks otherwise.



Below is a scaled back and simplified summary of my position.

If Canada wants measurement the market can trust, we have to remember one simple truth: advertising is bought and sold against people, not devices.

Big data is incredibly valuable – it gives us scale, speed, and granularity. But on its own, it often measures signals: a set-top box, a stream, an app, a device. What it cannot always tell us with confidence is who was there, whether people were watching together, or whether the data reflects the full population.

That is why people panels matter. A representative panel gives us the human truth underneath the data. It anchors measurement in real people, real demographics, and real behaviour. It allows us to calibrate large datasets, validate assumptions, and build cross-media measurement that reflects audiences – not just activity.

However, the case for people panels is bigger than advertising. This is about whether Canada has an independent, trusted way to understand how people engage with media.

In a fragmented world, every platform has data. But platform data is not the same as market truth. It is partial, commercial, and often self-reported. People panels give us a neutral, representative, third-party foundation. They help ensure we are measuring people, not just devices; behaviour, not just signals; and the whole population, not just the easiest-to-track audiences.

That matters for advertisers, yes – but it also matters for broadcasters, publishers, platforms, policymakers, Canadian content, local news, culture, and public trust.

If we lose independent people-based measurement, we move toward a market where every company defines its own truth. That is not a currency. That is fragmentation. This will break the media ecosystem.

The future needs big data, absolutely. But big data needs an independent people panel to calibrate it, validate it, and keep it honest. Big data gives us scale. Third-party people panel data gives us trust, accountability, and a common view of reality.

Ultimately, this isn't a choice between people panels and big data. The strongest measurement systems in the world rely on both. The question is whether Canada wants a measurement ecosystem built on competing versions of the truth, or on a trusted, independent view of how Canadians actually engage with media. For me, the answer is clear: measurement begins and ends with people.

Real people. Real behaviour. Real accountability.