

Dan Lourenco & Ryan Hughes #2 – GHOST x TMNT and the Future of Collabs | PPP #066

written by Mike Roberto | April 25, 2022

<https://blog.priceflow.com/podcast/dan-lourenco-ryan-hughes-ghost-tmnt-collabs-066>



Dan Lourenço and Ryan Hughes of Ghost invite Team PriceFlow to Chicago to launch the TMNT Collab, and talk about the future of collabs on the PriceFlow Podcast

On April 18, 2022, Team PriceFlow flew into Chicago, IL to visit the **Ghost Lifestyle** headquarters, celebrating the *Ghost Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles collaboration* launch. After meeting up with CEO Dan Lourenço, CMO Ryan Hughes, and the rest of the team, we received a tour, then got down to business.

You can see much of our trip in the incredible *Building The Brand* episode (S8:E27) named “*Turtle Power*”, where we got to participate in “*mailtime*”, doming a scoop (or two) of the new *OOZE* flavor, and celebrating in this launch.

But most importantly, our podcast with Dan and Ryan, where we talk about branding, the future of collabs, Ghost Energy’s insane success, and where Ghost goes from here.

Detailed show notes are below, and you can find the episode on our audio feeds or watch on YouTube:

Video: PriceFlow Visits the Ghost HQ with Dan and Ryan

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Audio Version

<https://media.blubrry.com/priceflow/blog.priceflow.com/wp-content/uploads/podcast/priceflow-podcast-066-dan-lourenco-ryan-hughes-tmnt-collabs.mp3>

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- **1:00** – The official announcement of Ghost's collaboration with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Dan comments that there were some frustrating leaks, but when was the last time people were so excited about a sports nutrition release that they couldn't wait to leak it?



“It’s annoying but humbling” says Dan, and Ryan comments that this was the entire point of the Ghost brand – to make things exciting again.

- **2:15** – Ghost is now strategic about when they release collaborations. They don’t just want to trot everything under the sun.

GNC is involved in this release in a few ways (and their HQ is nearby some incredible tacos). Dan and Ryan were at the hotel, and being silly, just decided “We should do a Turtles collab” and fired off an email to Nickelodeon at 1am.

- **4:10** – Mike backs things up and explains the entire collaboration – four different supplements, a new one in *Ghost Gamer Non-Stim*, and a new flavor named *OOZE*.
- **4:45** – In the late 80s and early 90s, Mike explains that the Ninja Turtles were *everything*. They sold over a *billion* dollars worth of action figures (in 1990s money)!
- **5:00** – Dan’s first exposure to the Ninja Turtles were the legendary Konami video game.
- **5:45** – Dan loves to force that nostalgia on the younger folks in the office. Whether it’s Sour Patch Kids and Swedish Fish, Oreos and Chips Ahoy, Space Jam, Ninja Turtles... they like to have a lot of fun with what they do.



Of the Space Jam Collabs, Ghost Legend's Monstars formula is the further derivation from the original

6:15 – It's become an easier story to tell to new partners. When pitching a new idea to a potential partner, Ghost already has social proof. They pitch their idea, and can essentially ask "Are you guys in or out?" – and then they get feedback and dial things in.

- **7:30** – Any content with licensed products needs to be extremely well planned and curated – you can't always have humans or objects next to the cartoons... but Space Jam *could* do that. Turtles didn't have that, because that's not how the brand ever worked.
- **8:30** – Which Ninja Turtle are you? Dan, Ben, and Mike all gravitated towards Donatello as a kid, and Ryan liked Michaelangelo – none of this is not surprising. As a side note, if we had to move things in person now, we'd make Ben into Raphael and Dan into Leonardo.
- **9:15** – Dan says they picked the most relevant product to each character:
 - **Leonardo** – the Leader – *Ghost Legend*
 - **Michaelangelo** – the fun-loving one – *Ghost Gamer*
 - **Raphael** – The fittest – *Ghost Pump*
 - **Donatello** – The quieter, more cerebral one – *Stim-Free Gamer*
- **10:00** – Why use the UK version of Legend? Dan explains that this was an *international* release, and Legend UK works in the countries they were

targeting.



Additionally, the feeling of alpha-yohimbine (from rauwolfia) in the US Ghost Legend isn't as "clean" as you'd want for a Leonardo-based supplement.

- **11:00** – Discussing rauwolfia more. Ben can use Ghost Legend UK more as a two-scoop daily driver, and Mike prefers the most recent (2021) *Maxx Chewing Ghost Legend* formula.
- **12:30** – Ryan discusses the 25-30 gram pre workout scoop. For him, it's a punch to the gut. Ben tells the Rutgers powerlifting group to just grab a couple scoops of Legend.
- **13:30** – Obligatory teasing of Ryan since he doesn't like the ingredient GBB (gamma butyrobetaine) that's now in *Ghost Burn Non-Stim*.
- **14:00** – Mike asks Ryan if it's OK that two of their major products have ingredients he *doesn't* actually prefer (*Legend* with rauwolfia and *Burn Non-Stim* with GBB). Is this an issue as a founder of the company?

Answer: "This brand is far bigger than Dan and Ryan." Ryan can't love every single product. He still takes Legend, but prefers the *Space Jam Tune Squad* version better, which was his favorite pre-workout.

- **16:00** – There are a lot of caffeinated options from Ghost. Ryan points out

that Ghost Gamer is one that he'll use on the sticks (playing hockey).

17:15 – Dan explains the differences between beverage formulation vs. powder formulation. If Ghost can spend 10-15 cents more per tub to make a better powder, they do it. But when it comes to *beverages*, that's a harder decision. Every penny counts with energy drinks, which they've learned close with Anheuser Busch. You have to fight for certain ingredients.

Ghost has to educate partner companies like Anheuser Busch about what certain ingredients are like. He reiterates Ghost's mantra, *"Formulate for the 1%, build the brand, the marketing, the message, and the flavors for the 99%"*.

The inclusion of AstraGin and NeuroFactor are in *Ghost Energy* for the 1%, undoubtedly, and Ghost fought for those to be included.

- *"One of my favorite details about this release is that it's international from day one."*

I feel terrible every time we announce a really cool innovation or cool limited edition and it's just for everyone here in North America, and I feel bad. This is a global world we're living in, Ghost is global, we're in 55+ countries around the world and growing."

– Dan Lourenço

- **19:30** – Mike reminisces about 2016, when Ghost launched. Ryan talks about how Ben's friends at Rutgers refer to Ghost as "trendy", but that would imply a brand that's "in and out". Ghost has staying power, they've been out for six years now. Ghost has expanded with tons of new categories (Energy, RTDs, etc).
- **21:00** – Ben asks, is Ghost growing with their demographic, or are they grabbing new young people continuously?

Every birthday, they add a year to the core demographic of Ghost. The answer is *both* though – they're rocking with folks for the whole ride, but are bringing new consumers in quite consistently. The new holistic health products (like *Glow* and *Greens*) have brought in many new customers and fans.



The Ghost demographic is *far* broader than most realize.

- **23:30** – With so much success in Ghost Energy and the major SKUs, is it worth doing “small-time” formulas like a glucose disposal agent (GDA) that won’t have nearly as much traction?

Ghost doesn’t think about that. In fact, their huge limited-edition collabs often take more work than an “evergreen” SKU, and they’re not even around forever. Dan and Ryan don’t look at *everything* with ROI in mind.

The collabs are about engagement and fun – not always about money. Ben mentions that chocolate and vanilla sell best – Dan and Ryan lean into their shoe comparison, looking at Nike: the core, evergreen SKUs are like the “dad shoes” in the shoe industry that make more than all the crazy collabs. The success of the core SKUs *enable* the fun collabs.

- **26:30** – Discussing how Dan and Ryan love shoes and are inspired by parts of the shoe industry. “*We wanted to build the Nike of sports nutrition*” – many different areas of the brand. Sports Nutrition has many one-hit-wonders, and Ghost always worked hard to avoid that.

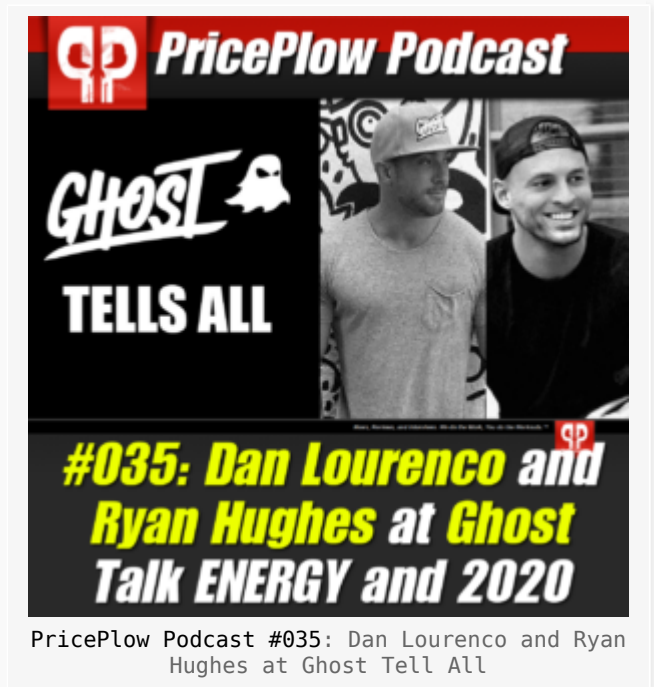
29:00 – Does Ghost segment their teams with different product categories? It’s one unifying brand, but as they scale, there are some members who have more specific strategies, especially with Ghost Gamer.

- “*The industry before Ghost was ‘fake perfect’*”

– *Dan Lourenço*

- **30:00** – Mike can tell that Ghost is jumping into gaming and esports head-first.

Ghost is doing it, but they're doing it *authentically*. Dan tells us that a wise man once said that *"Authenticity is undefeated."* It's an emerging category, but too many companies are painting gamers with a broad brush. It's not like that. What gamer *exactly* are they trying to reach? The ultra-competitive type, or the "everyman's gamer"?



There are many worlds *within* the gaming community that brands can target – but most consumer product goods (CPG) companies *don't*. *"There's a long history of brands taking a pre-workout, slapping the name 'neuro' on them, and then telling gamers that it's for them"*.

- **33:00** – Some specific questions. Ninja Turtles collab is limited, and Ghost Gamer Non-Stim is the same as Ghost Gamer, only with caffeine and theobromine removed. It will hopefully be available later on in different flavors, but that's not 100% confirmed or planned yet. For now, it's all about getting Donatello out.
- **34:45** – Ghost Gamer Non-Stim is very stackable, and thanks to the structure of *nooLVL*, it can even be used to level up your pre-workout.
- **36:00** – Regarding the 00ZE flavor and the future of collabs.

Dan: *"One of my favorite details about this release is that it's international from day one. I feel terrible every time we announce a really cool innovation or cool limited edition and it's just for everyone here in North America, and*

I feel bad. This is a global world we're living in, Ghost is global, we're in 55+ countries around the world and growing."

Ghost wants to keep doing collabs – they were the first, and they're going to raise the bar. Not all licenses are created equal. They say no to a lot of them now.

Ghost is getting pitched on collabs, they say "no" to many, but then they see *other* brands doing it!

But how many is too many? Who's the appropriate watchdog or guardian? It needs to fit the brand and the store. GNC collaborating with Girl Scout Cookies is not a small thing!

A collab for the sake of collabing is a risk for everyone.

Dan's first collabs *did* change the game, and he says that humbly. But what's next? Dan congratulates brands on thinking the way Ghost was thinking six years ago. The industry needs to challenge itself to push things forward, not backward.

Dan's friend LT says that *"The pressure is on us to look around the corner of what's coming next and build that future, while attacking exactly what consumers need today."* They have some stuff planned for next summer, and simultaneously need to figure out exactly how next month is going.

Dan's most interested in some international collabs.

- **42:30** – Ghost was the first to do collabs, but in hindsight, it was *obvious*. Why was Ghost first?

Ryan: "We didn't have a single conversation about dollars until we were forced to because of some of the bigger partnerships, but we didn't start this about cash."

Dan: "We're just well-educated fans"



Mike reminds everyone that the industry was looked down upon back in 2016, and still had a lot of dirty things happening. Ghost *single-handedly* leveled up the *entire* sports nutrition sector, bringing legitimacy to nearly everyone.

- **45:00** – Ryan explains that Anheuser Busch had independently seen Ghost at GNC, pulled the tub off the shelves, and cold-emailed Dan and Ryan about doing an RTD. It so happened that Ghost was already working on one, and that began the relationship.

The collabs, the labels, the formulas all had a big part of them getting noticed over every other brand in the store.

- **47:00** – Brands now care *far* more about labels and details than they did pre-Ghost. Labels used to be awful – industry-wide – now they’re not.
- **48:00** – Dan discusses the behind-the-scenes footage. The original plan was that there *was* no marketing – just show consumers under the hood. *“The industry before Ghost was ‘fake perfect’”*

51:45 – There’s no job too big or too small for anyone at the company. Dan and Ryan love their products. Some company leaders don’t even know what’s inside anymore – these guys love the category and love the industry.

- *“This brand is far bigger than Dan and Ryan.”*

– Ryan Hughes

Ryan: *“We didn’t have a single conversation about dollars until we were forced to*

because of some of the bigger partnerships, but we didn't start this about cash." Dan: "We're just well-educated fans"

After the podcast, we went into a Q&A session, which you'll be able to find on the PricePLOW YouTube channel soon!

Watch *Turtle Power: Building The Brand S8:E27*

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You can also listen to two other PricePLOW Podcasts with Ghost:

- #035: Dan Lourenço & Ryan Hughes – Ghost Energy V2
- #041: Dan Lourenço: The State of Supplements in Esports

Thanks to Dan, Ryan, and the entire team at Ghost for having us on! Read more about the *Ghost TMNT collab* and sign up for our Ghost Lifestyle news alerts below:

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